



THE CONDUCT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS

COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO
THE CONDUCT OF
LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS

Research Volume III:

The Local Government Elector

*Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Environment
the Secretary of State for Scotland
and the Secretary of State for Wales
by Command of Her Majesty
June 1986*

LONDON

HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE



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RESEARCH VOLUME III

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTOR

1. ATTITUDES TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Research Adviser to the Committee
in association with NOP Market Research Ltd

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This is a summary report on the survey carried out for the Committee by NOP Market Research Ltd. The survey was designed to discover the levels of public knowledge of and satisfaction with local government and to elicit views on a number of specific issues which arise within a system of local democracy. The particular questions of local electoral behaviour—voters' choices and the influences upon them—are covered separately in the second part of this volume. This part describes the findings of the survey as a whole, and explores the extent to which electors' attitudes differ according to their personal characteristics and circumstances: that is, who they are, and where and how they live.

THE SCOPE OF THE SURVEY

A copy of the questionnaire is to be found in Part III of this Volume. While it covered a wide range of issues, a number of questions were included simply in order to construct variables for the analysis of electoral behaviour presented in Part II. The remaining questions covered five broad themes, which are reflected in the organisation of the chapters in this part. These themes were:

- (i) public awareness and knowledge of local government;
- (ii) the extent to which people are satisfied with the standard of their local services;
- (iii) their experiences of complaining about local decisions and their assessment of the extent to which decisions are open to challenge;
- (iv) their views as to the relationship of local authorities and the national government; and
- (v) their opinions (as distinct from their behaviour) in respect of local elections, party politics and the operation of the local democratic system.

This is the first national study of attitudes to local government since that carried out by the Government Social Survey on behalf of the Maud Committee in 1965 and published as Volume 3 of their Report. However, the opportunities to make direct comparisons with the findings of that survey are limited. Maud's concern was very different from that of the Widdicombe Committee. Their survey was primarily concerned with the citizen's involvement in the community, and with the barriers to the wider recruitment of councillors. This survey places considerable emphasis upon the significance of party politics, a matter delicately avoided by the Maud Committee attitude survey. In those areas where there are common concerns, comparison is inhibited by the specific reference of many questions in the earlier survey to the pre-organisation system of local government. Some scope remains for broad comparison, though rarely sufficient to provide a robust measure of change over time. This is largely because our primary concern in respect of each of the five themes described below was to ask clear questions—and to enable valid inferences to be made—rather than to gather comparative data for its own sake.

Public awareness of local government

The questionnaire contained a number of questions of a purely factual nature, designed to test our respondents' levels of knowledge of local government in general, and of the arrangements operating in their own locality. For example, they were asked if they were able to name their local and county or regional authorities, to identify the services provided by these and other levels of government, and to say whether they had ever been in contact with their local councillor or with the council offices. They were invited to name any one of their local ward councillors, to give their party affiliation, and to say what political party (if any) controlled the local and the county or regional council. Their replies to these questions are the subject matter of Chapter 2.

Satisfaction with local services

Having discovered the extent to which our respondents were informed about local government, we also wished to establish the extent to which they were satisfied with its performance. To this end, we asked our respondents to say how well, in their view, the local authorities in their area "run things". We also asked them to say how satisfied they were, both with a range of specific services provided by the local authorities and (for those who had been in contact with their local councillor or a council official) with the councillors and officials themselves. These several aspects of public satisfaction are dealt with in Chapter 3.

Complaining and challenging

We expected that some of our respondents would have experience of complaining to their local authority about matters with which they were dissatisfied, and that more might have wished to complain, but for some reason did not, or could not, do so. We therefore asked a series of questions about whether they had wanted to complain at any time, about what sort of matter, whether they had in fact done so, and to what effect. We also asked some hypothetical questions about their willingness to challenge a local council decision that they considered "really wrong", about the channels of protest they would envisage using, and about what they considered to be the relative effectiveness of those channels. Complaining and challenging is the subject of Chapter 4.

The role of local government

We also sought to establish just what people considered to be the place of local government in Britain. It was our expectation that views would differ on the proper scope of local government action, with some people urging an expanded role, and others desiring more restriction. We asked our respondents to define for themselves the appropriate remit for local government in relation to a given range of functions. We also asked whether they thought that local services would be better run by people appointed by the central government. We asked for their views on the extent to which central control of local government was desirable, and on the amount of autonomy that they thought local authorities have in relation to their own expenditure. We consider these issues in Chapter 5.

Elections and party politics

In different parts of the country people are subject to different forms of local electoral system. At the time of the survey all had the opportunity to vote for their county or regional council every four years. Some also have the opportu-

nity to vote for their district or borough council at a similar interval but in a different year, while others are able to vote for one of their local councillors every year, when a third of them retire. We asked our respondents for views on these two systems, on whether local authorities are best run on party lines or by independent councillors, and on whether local councils had become more or less dominated by party politics in the last 10 years. We asked if they themselves voted for a party or for an individual candidate at local election time, and whether they felt their choice to be influenced by local or national considerations. Finally, we repeated a series of questions from the Maud Committee survey in order to assess our respondents' views on the processes of local democracy. All of these matters are considered in Chapter 6.

THE MANY PUBLICS

Throughout this report, overall figures are quoted for "public" attitudes towards the various issues on which our respondents were questioned. But closer inspection will often reveal an apparently even division of opinion within an undifferentiated public actually to be a sharp contrast of opinion between two (or more) groups of people. Such contrasts will often reflect the extent to which people are divided by some important aspect of their experience: age, social class, housing tenure, residence in a particular part of the country or within the jurisdiction of a local authority whose political colour is uncongenial will all have some bearing upon the patterns of opinion. Such lines of division as these—and there are many more which can be conceived—are relevant in any consideration of how attitudes are shaped, although it must be borne in mind that differences manifest themselves more often as degrees of emphasis, than as absolute polarities.

It will be apparent, therefore, that this report begins with a presumption of diversity. The local government electorate contains within itself varied interests and experiences which can be expected to prove important in shaping the patterns of opinion—and indeed, the patterns of behaviour—in respect of local politics. As will be seen, the search for simple majorities as a test of "public opinion" is ill-founded. There are many publics, and diverse opinions. The diversity of the local government system, of which much has been made in *Research Volume I*, is more than matched by the diversity within the public itself. Only when this is recognised can the bald tabulations of public attitudes be weighed, and their significance assessed.

It is of course normal practice for such surveys as this to gather data on the personal characteristics and circumstances of the respondents, as well as information on their attitudes, recollections and expectations. These are used as "analysis variables" to divide the sample into sub-groups for the purpose of exploring these differences. Some of these *personal* attributes—the age, sex, social class, and working status of the individual respondent—are straightforward enough, and their meaning self-evident.

A further set of analysis variables are important because they can be assumed to have relevance to the individual as a citizen, bearing as they do upon the salience of local government and the different ways in which individuals experience it. This second set *locates* the individual according to the housing tenure of the household in which he or she lives (that is, whether the household occupies local

authority rental housing, or privately owned or rented accommodation). It also includes the part of the country in which he or she resides, as this determines the particular type of local authority structure by which local services are provided. Also considered here are the length of time the individual has lived in that area and whether or not the household is believed to pay rates in full, in part, or not at all.

A third set of analysis variables used throughout this report are themselves *attitudinal* or "subjective" rather than "objective" characteristics. Most can be discussed in their own right as important attitudes, and to some extent feature in this way in subsequent chapters. Their significance here however is that they can "double up" as lines of division within the population and be used to assess the patterns of attitudes to yet other questions. For this purpose we have chosen such attitudinal variables as the political party identification of the respondents, their voting habits, their general level of knowledge about local government, their feelings about the desirability of party politics within it, their satisfaction with local services, and the extent to which they are politically "sympathetic" to the party in control of their local council. It remains to describe the broad profile of the sample in these terms.

Personal characteristics

The personal characteristics of the respondents which we collected for this purpose were age, sex, social class and activity status—or whether or not the respondent was in work. The definition of social class used in this report is that devised by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) and is widely used in market research. It does not equate exactly with the Registrar-General's social classes I-V.

A profile of the sample in terms of these variables is shown in Table 1.1 where a comparison is made with the population of Great Britain. It should of course be borne in mind that the sample is drawn in the first instance from the electoral register, supplemented by the inclusion of a small number of non-electors and—for the reasons set out by Professor Miller in the second part of this Volume—will not be entirely representative of the adult population as a whole. This is noticeable in terms of the age and activity profiles of the sample.

Locational characteristics

Table 1.2 summarises what we have termed the "locational characteristics" of the sample. Such characteristics include housing tenure, length of residence, region and the ratepaying status of the household. Each of these categories involves considerable compression of the data actually collected. There are for example a range of *housing tenures* into which the respondents' households actually fall, including private renting and renting from a housing association. The numbers in these categories were very small and have been excluded from the analysis, to form two categories: "owner occupiers", in which outright ownership and buying a mortgage are treated as a single category, and "council renters". Owner-occupiers are over-represented in the sample.

Length of residence in the locality was originally coded into three categories: less than one year; one year, but less than five years; and five years and more. In the

Table 1.1

All respondents

**The sample: personal characteristics compared with population
of Great Britain**

	Great Britain	sample	base
	%	%	
Age¹			
18-34	34	31	(360)
35-54	31	35	(400)
55-64	15	14	(164)
65 and over	20	18	(210)
Sex²			
men	49	47	(537)
women	51	53	(603)
Social class³			
AB	17	19	(217)
C1	22	25	(284)
C2	28	27	(306)
D	18	14	(155)
E	15	15	(176)
Activity status⁴			
working	44	57	(651)
not working	56	43	(488)
All respondents			(1,144)

Source: ¹ *Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1986* (1981 UK census population)

² *ibid* (1984 estimates)

³ *Market Research Society Yearbook 1986*

⁴ *Employment Gazette*, February 1986. Figures are for UK in September 1985.

tables which follow the respondents are divided into two rather unequal groups; those having lived in the area for less than five years and those having lived there for more than that period. There are no national figures which are strictly comparable. The tables show the estimated proportion of the population who have moved between local authority areas in the last five years. The respondents appear to have heavily over-reported such movement, the form of the question having encouraged them to interpret shorter distance moves as moves between areas.

Region is subject to considerable compression in order to provide sufficient numbers of respondents in each group to make analysis possible and to minimise the effects of the "clustering" of the sample in a small number of constituencies within each region. Our primary concern was to capture the different experiences of living under different forms of local authority system, and for this reason we grouped the respondents into four categories, namely Scotland, Greater London, metropolitan England (that is, the metropolitan county areas),

Table 1.2

All respondents

The sample: locational characteristics compared with population of Great Britain			
	Great Britain	sample	base
	%	%	
Housing tenure¹			
owner occupied	57	71	(815)
council tenant	32	20	(234)
Length of residence²			
up to 5 years	12	22	(254)
5 years or more	88	78	(890)
Region³			
London	12	11	(123)
metropolitan England	20	21	(235)
rest of England and Wales	59	60	(677)
Scotland	9	9	(108)
Ratepaying⁴			
pays rates in full	67	71	(812)
rates partly rebated	18	10	(118)
does not pay rates	16	11	(122)
All respondents			(1,144)

¹ General Household Survey, 1983.² Estimated from 1981 census national migration tables.³ Population Trends.⁴ Information supplied by the Department of the Environment.

and the rest of England and Wales (where the shire county and district system obtains).

Ratepaying refers to the grouping of responses to the questions on whether the respondent *believes* that the household of which he or she is a member pays rates and, if so, whether these are thought to be rebated in full or in part. In Table 1.2 and throughout the report, "does not pay rates" includes both members of households which are not liable for rates, and those where the rates are rebated in full.

Attitudinal characteristics

Table 1.3 below gives the overall frequencies of response to the questions on the political party preferences of the respondents and their views upon the desirability of party politics in local government. It also shows the compounded responses to a range of other questions concerning knowledge, satisfaction and voting habits. Table 1.4 shows, for that subset of the respondents who support one of the two major political parties, whether they are "sympathetic" or "unsympathetic" to their local council. The construction of some of these variables requires some explanation here.

Table 1.3

All respondents

The sample: attitudinal characteristics		
	sample	base
	%	
Party identification		
Conservative	31	(359)
Labour	34	(390)
Alliance	17	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship		
prefer party system	34	(393)
prefer non-party system	52	(593)
Knowledge of local government		
well-informed	18	(209)
quite well-informed	34	(387)
not very well-informed	36	(407)
uninformed	12	(141)
Satisfaction		
satisfied	61	(697)
quite satisfied	15	(168)
dissatisfied	10	(114)
Participation in elections		
habitual voter	49	(557)
occasional voter	33	(379)
non-voter	10	(114)
All respondents		(1,144)

Knowledge is a compound score of the responses to a series of questions concerning the names of the local and county authority, those of the local councillor(s), their political colour and that of the party in control of the local council, and the allocation of responsibilities for providing local services. Each of these is separately discussed in Chapter 2. A total of 16 correct answers could be given, and we have banded the respondents as follows: "well-informed" (13–16 correct);

“quite well-informed” (10–12 correct); “not very well-informed” (6–9 correct); and “uninformed” (0–5 correct).

Satisfaction is a similar but simpler compound score. Respondents were asked whether they thought their county and local authorities “run things very well, fairly well or not at all well”. Their responses, discussed in detail in Chapter 4, are here aggregated as “satisfied” (both county and local authorities seen as running things “very” or “fairly” well); “quite satisfied” (district or county *only* seen as running things “very” or “fairly” well); and “dissatisfied” (both district and county seen as running things “not at all well”).

Participation compounds the respondents’ recollections of having voted at the last local election together with their expectation that they would be voting at the next. We have created three categories: the “habitual voter”, who voted at the last election and expects to vote at the next; the “occasional voter” who has voted or will vote at the one but not the other; and the “non-voter”, who did not vote at the last election and does not expect to vote at the next. A full assessment of these aspects of party choice and political participation and their significance for local democracy is made in Part II of this volume.

Table 1.4

Major party supporters

The sample: political sympathy for local council

	sample %	base
Conservative in Conservative locality	11	(143)
Conservative in non-Conservative locality	18	(217)
Labour in Labour locality	20	(195)
Labour in non-Labour locality	16	(198)
Politically sympathetic to local council	36	(338)
Politically unsympathetic to local council	48	(415)
All respondents		(753)

Political sympathy, shown separately in Table 1.4, is the term we use to express the correspondence, or lack of it, between the respondents’ own politics and those of the political group (if any) controlling the local council in the area where the respondent lives. This variable was constructed in order to explore the degree to which “attitudes to local government” are in reality expressions of support for or opposition to a particular local authority, thus reflecting locally a familiar phenomenon in the field of national electoral analysis. There are six basic categories. Conservative supporters are divided into those who live in Conservative controlled districts and those who do not; Labour supporters are divided into those who live in Labour-controlled districts and those who do not. These four categories are also combined differently to show those respondents (Labour and Conservative) who live, and those who do not, in the area of a local (that is

district or borough) authority controlled by a political group of the same complexion as themselves. Because of the problems of interpreting the situation of those who do not support either of the major parties, they are excluded from this analysis.

Throughout this report, the figures shown in the tables are weighted. Details of the weighting are given in the methodological appendix. A figure of less than 0.5% is shown as 0. Non-responses are generally excluded from the tables and, due to this factor and to rounding effects, percentages may not add to 100.

CHAPTER 2

PUBLIC AWARENESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In this chapter we examine our respondents' knowledge of local government, of their own local authorities, of their councillors, and of the political complexion of the party (if any) in control of their local and county or regional councils. We also examine the extent to which our respondents have had personal contact with their councillors and with council departments.

THE LEVEL OF GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

We asked our respondents a series of six factual questions. Four of these questions concerned political representation, and invited the respondent to name his or her local councillor (Q.14a), to say what party the councillor was from (Q.14b), and to say what party was in control of the county or regional (Q.15a) and district (city or borough) (Q.15b) councils. These questions are discussed in detail later in this chapter. One of the questions (Q.5) presented the respondents with a list of 10 public services and invited them to say whether they were provided by the county or regional council, by the lower tier council, or by some other body. We also sought some measure of the relative familiarity of the local and county or regional councils, and so asked the respondents simply to give the names of both (Q.2 and 3). The responses to these questions are presented in detail in the discussion of local government structure in the second section of this chapter.

In this section we discuss our general, aggregate measure of knowledge of local government. There were sixteen possibly correct answers to be given to these questions, and the overall responses were coded into four categories. Those who gave thirteen or more correct answers we term "well-informed". Those who scored 10–12 correct answers were coded as "quite well-informed". Those who had between six and nine right we term "not very well-informed", and those who scored five or less we term "uninformed".

Taking the two broad categories of "well" or "quite well-informed" on the one hand, and of "not very well-informed" or "uninformed" on the other, we find that the respondents fall into two equal groups. Slightly over half (52%) scored in the upper two categories and can be regarded as knowledgeable about local government. Slightly under half (48%) had a poor or slight level of knowledge. The distribution of responses was almost perfectly normal, with 70% of the sample falling into the middle two categories.

Tables 2.1 to 2.4 show the breakdown of scores by our three categories of analysis variable and (for that smaller number of people for whom we have the data) by the age at which they finished their full-time education. None of the associations shown in Table 2.1 are surprising, but rather bear out long-familiar correlates of political knowledge. There is, for example, a marked association with social class. Two-thirds of the ABs are knowledgeable, but only one-third of the social group E. A rough division at the C1-C2 point, between manual and non-

TABLE 2.1

All respondents

Knowledge of local government by age, sex, social class and activity status						
		well-informed	quite well-informed	not very well-informed	uninformed	base
Age						
18-34	%	10	37	39	14	(360)
35-54	%	21	35	36	8	(400)
55-64	%	27	33	30	10	(164)
65 and over	%	20	26	35	18	(210)
Sex						
men	%	26	37	30	8	(537)
women	%	12	31	41	15	(603)
Social class						
AB	%	29	38	30	4	(217)
C1	%	22	34	37	7	(284)
C2	%	15	38	33	14	(306)
D	%	13	31	40	17	(155)
E	%	10	24	42	23	(176)
Activity status						
working	%	20	38	32	10	(651)
not working	%	16	28	41	15	(488)
All respondents	%	18	34	36	12	(1,144)

manual workers, exemplifies the relationship between social class and knowledge.

To some extent what is being measured here is educational level. As Table 2.2 shows, the age at which the respondents completed their education has little effect among those who left school at or below the present statutory leaving age. Indeed, those who left school at 14 or 15 are about as knowledgeable as those who did so at 16, reflecting the greater average age of this group. But education is clearly influential among those who completed it at 17 years or above. This relationship between level of education and knowledge of local government is broadly in line with that shown in the Maud Committee study.

As to the other personal attributes, the table shows the familiar tendency for the youngest (18-34) and oldest (over 65) groups to be less knowledgeable than those in the middle age ranges. The Maud survey found that men were consistently more knowledgeable than women and this too is borne out by our own findings, at least so far as the aggregate scores are concerned. The working population is better informed than those who do not work, although this distinction is one both of age and sex, as most of those who are not working are either retired or are women looking after a home. The extent to which people are well-

informed about local government or any other aspect of public life is a function of their engagement with the world outside the home.

TABLE 2.2 Respondents no longer in full-time education

Knowledge of local government by age of completing full-time education						
		well-informed	quite well-informed	not very well-informed	uninformed	base
14 or 15 years	%	20	27	39	15	(476)
16 years	%	14	37	35	15	(268)
17 years and over	%	25	42	30	4	(253)
All¹	%	19	33	35	12	(997)

¹ The base for this table is the 997 respondents who answered the question on the age at which they completed their full-time education and it excludes a small number of respondents who were still in full-time education at the time of the interview.

TABLE 2.3 All respondents

Knowledge of local government by locational characteristics						
		well-informed	quite well-informed	not very well-informed	uninformed	base
Housing tenure						
owner occupier	%	20	36	35	10	(815)
council tenant	%	17	30	35	18	(234)
Length of residence						
up to 5 years	%	12	33	36	20	(254)
5 years or more	%	20	34	36	10	(890)
Region						
London	%	23	35	33	10	(123)
metropolitan						
England	%	22	39	26	13	(235)
rest of England and Wales	%	18	32	38	12	(677)
Scotland	%	8	31	44	16	(108)
Ratepaying						
pays rates in full	%	18	35	35	10	(812)
rates partly rebated	%	24	29	39	8	(118)
does not pay rates	%	11	36	34	19	(122)
All respondents	%	18	34	36	12	(1,144)

Turning now to Table 2.3, we see some indication of a relationship between length of residence and general level of knowledge about local government, although the composition of our score, which compounds both general and specifically local knowledge, actually blurs this effect. We shall see later in this chapter that length of residence discriminates very sharply between the extent to which people are informed about purely local matters. This is much as intuition would suggest, but it contrasts with the finding of the 1965 survey that long-standing residents had in some respects a weaker perception of local government.

Whether or not the household in which the respondent resides pays rates to the local authority and, if so, whether in full or in part has no very clear relationship with knowledge. The extent to which respondents in different parts of the country understand their local government is of interest, with those in the metropolitan areas being rather better informed.

Table 2.4 shows the relationship between levels of knowledge and some of the attitudinal variables that we use throughout this report. There are differences between the supporters of the several political parties, but these are small, and largely reflect the underlying class association with party support. Of particular interest is the finding that those who prefer local government to be run independently of party politics are noticeably better informed than those who favour the party system although, as we shall see later, support for non-partisan local government is itself a reflection of higher social status. We shall also see that this

TABLE 2.4

All respondents

Knowledge of local government by selected attitudinal characteristics

		well-informed	quite well-informed	not very well-informed	uninformed	base
Party identification						
Conservative	%	20	37	35	8	(359)
Labour	%	18	31	36	16	(390)
Alliance	%	21	40	31	8	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship						
prefer party system	%	17	32	39	12	(393)
prefer non-party system	%	21	38	32	8	(593)
Participation in elections						
habitual voter	%	27	35	29	8	(557)
occasional voter	%	11	35	41	13	(379)
non-voter	%	6	20	43	31	(114)
All respondents	%	18	34	36	12	(1,144)

group is not consistently more knowledgeable across all of the items. Just how much better informed is the more active citizen—he or she who claims to vote habitually—can be seen from the table: 74% of non-voters gave less than 10 correct answers to the questions which were devised to test factual knowledge, compared with only 37% of the habitual voters and 54% of the occasional voters.

Overall, the level of knowledge displayed by our respondents in what was a fairly exacting series of questions appears to be quite high. We turn now to the disaggregation of this composite score into the specific questions to see the extent to which the general knowledge score actually conceals areas of relative strength and weakness in public knowledge of local government.

THE STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Early in the interview, we asked our respondents “do you know the name of your county [or regional] council?” and then “do you know the name of your city [or district, or borough] council?” The field interviewers were briefed to put the question in the most appropriate form according to the locality in which they were interviewing, and to code the responses on the spot as correct or incorrect. In itself, and as an indicator of political awareness or knowledge, the answer to neither question is particularly interesting. Our choice of questions was made

TABLE 2.5

All respondents

**Ability to name local and county/regional council by
age, sex and social class**

	city, district or borough council correct	county or regional council correct	base
	%	%	
Age			
18–34	67	45	(360)
35–54	77	57	(400)
55–64	70	59	(164)
65 and Over	62	49	(210)
Sex			
male	77	61	(537)
female	64	45	(603)
Social class			
AB	83	68	(217)
C1	75	57	(284)
C2	71	49	(306)
D	66	43	(155)
E	49	40	(176)
All respondents	70	52	(1,144)

partly with a view to the composition of a general knowledge variable, and partly with a view to assessing the relative salience of the two tiers of local government.

The Maud survey had found that electors were very much less knowledgeable about their county authorities. We might expect that the reorganisations of local government, which both changed many county boundaries and created new county and (in Scotland) regional councils, might (despite the intention that reorganisation would increase public understanding of local government) have maintained this distinction. Table 2.5 shows that there is indeed a clear and consistent difference between the ability of people—regardless of age, sex, or social class—to name their local and their county or regional council, to the disadvantage of the latter.

Table 2.6 shows the breakdown of responses by our locational variables. A number of points of interest emerge in this table. First, those living in council accommodation are much more likely to be able to name the lower tier authority than the upper, which probably reflects the very much greater significance of the district authority, as a landlord, in the life of the council tenant. Second, length

TABLE 2.6

All respondents

Ability to name local and county/regional council by locational characteristics			
	city, district or borough council correct	county or regional council correct	base
	%	%	
Housing tenure			
owner occupier	75	57	(815)
council tenant	59	39	(234)
Length of residence			
up to 5 years	63	50	(254)
5 years or more	72	53	(890)
Region			
London	81	38	(123)
metropolitan England	65	45	(235)
rest of England and Wales	73	57	(677)
Scotland	52	52	(108)
Ratepaying			
pays rates in full	74	55	(812)
rates partly rebated	67	60	(118)
does not pay rates	60	36	(122)
All respondents	70	52	(1,144)

of residence has virtually no effect on familiarity with the county or regional council. This absence of association survives closer inspection, for the figures are little different even when we compare within the broad bands shown in the table; 48% of those living in the area for less than one year could name their county council. However, as the table shows, length of residence has a stronger effect on the respondents' ability to name the local council, and in this instance the relationship is continued when we refine the category.

The sharp difference shown in the table between the proportion of Londoners able to name their local and "county" council is almost certainly misleading. Londoners are in many respects well-informed about their local government, but it was not possible to find a form of wording for this question that was as appropriate to the Greater London Council as to the other "upper tier" authorities. It is unlikely that nearly two-thirds of Londoners were unaware of the GLC's existence, although the pilot interviews for this survey suggested that some outer Londoners see themselves as still living within the jurisdiction of their former county councils, an impression which the maintenance of traditional counties in postal addresses is likely to continue to sustain.

We were also interested to discover the extent to which our respondents understood the allocation of functions between the two levels of local government and other public agencies. So, following the question on the names of the two local authorities, they were told what those names were and that "Some services in your area are provided by locally-elected councils, that is [county] council and [local] council, and other services are provided by different bodies such as the central government and nationalised industries". They were then asked, for each of the ten services shown in Table 2.7 below, to say whether the services

Table 2.7

All respondents

**Allocation of public services to county/regional councils,
local councils and other public bodies**

		county/ regional council	local council	other public body	don't know
schools	%	57	26	6	10
council housing	%	19	73	2	7
hospitals	%	44	15	33	8
street cleaning	%	13	80	2	5
electricity supply	%	15	12	63	11
home helps for the elderly	%	25	58	6	11
rubbish collection	%	14	79	4	3
unemployment benefit	%	17	11	60	13
dealing with planning applications	%	22	69	2	10
the fire service	%	57	26	10	8

were provided by the county or local council, or "by some other body". The table shows the overall pattern of response.

It is apparent from Table 2.7 that relatively few people were unable to hazard a guess as to who provides what, and that for the most part the scope of local government provision is fairly well understood. The notable exception concerns the hospital service, which 59% of our respondents imagined was (still) a local government service, 44% locating it with the county councils. This error was made by very few (15%) of the Londoners in our sample and was most prevalent in Scotland and in non-metropolitan England. We have no direct comparison with the Maud survey, although it is worth noting that 26% of the Maud sample were unable to spontaneously name any service provided by the then county councils. Again, our own findings point towards a reasonably well-informed electorate.

This impression is borne out by the figures presented in Table 2.8, where we show the proportions of respondents living under different local government systems who were able to correctly locate the local government services with the appropriate authority. Most local services are correctly located by most respondents, although there are some anomalies as between different regions. Only in the case of home helps for the elderly do a minority of respondents correctly assign the service. The Maud survey concluded that "there is a certain amount of confusion in the minds of informants as to the respective duties of 'local' and 'county' authorities" (p 14). Direct comparison is impossible, both for the reasons set out in Chapter 1 and because of the particular way in which the questions were asked in 1965. There are, however, some indications that the level of confusion as to the operation of the local government system is in some important respects lower today.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

We asked those interviewed "Do you know the name of [any of] the councillor[s] for your ward on [local] council?", the interviewers being briefed in this case to adapt the question to the form of representation of the ward in which the respondent lived—single or multi-member—and to code the correctness of the reply against the name(s) provided by the local authority in question. The respondents were then asked "Do you know what party your local councillor[s] is [are] from?" the response being similarly handled by the interviewer. They were then asked "What party is in control" of the county and local councils respectively. Replies were coded as correct or otherwise according to the information provided in the Municipal Yearbook, updated by the returns from the political organisation survey (for which see *Research Volume I*).

Tables 2.9 to 2.11 present the results for these four questions, broken down by our three sets of analysis variables. It will be seen immediately that while only 30% of the respondents could name any of their local ward councillors, 54% could identify their party (where they had one) 61% the party in control of the local council and 56% the party in control at the upper tier. The broad distributions by age and sex shown in Table 2.9 follow the familiar patterns, with the exception that as many women as men were able to name their local councillor, although this parity was not maintained across the other questions. Of particular

TABLE 2.8

All respondents

Correct allocation of local government services, by region								
	schools	council housing	street cleaning	home helps	rubbish collection	planning applications	fire service	base
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
London ¹	—	66	84	77	83	76	49	(123)
metropolitan England	56	77	80	69	82	72	49	(235)
rest of England and Wales	73	73	80	33	78	71	61	(677)
Scotland	55	74	73	27	74	39	57	(108)
All respondents	67	73	80	45	79	69	57	(1,144)

¹ Schools, which are provided by ILEA in inner London and by the boroughs in outer London, are excluded here due to all London respondents being coded as a single category.

interest are the relationships with social class and activity status. Social groups D and E were slightly more likely to be able to name a councillor than were the AB and C1 respondents, while the distributions for the other questions were not so strongly skewed in favour of the higher status groups than in the case of knowledge generally, or the service-based questions. These are surprising findings, as is the absence of any marked advantage on the part of those who work over those who don't; indeed, those whose lives are more home centered are considerably more likely to be able to name a councillor.

TABLE 2.9

All respondents

Ability to name local councillor and identify (i) their party, and (ii) party in control of the local and county/regional councils by age, sex, social class and activity status.

	correct name of local councillor	correct party of local councillor	correct controlling party, local council	correct controlling party, county/ regional council	base
	%	%	%	%	
Age					
18-34	20	46	57	49	(360)
35-54	31	59	64	57	(400)
55-64	40	62	64	60	(164)
65 and over	37	55	62	63	(210)
Sex					
men	30	58	66	62	(537)
women	29	52	56	50	(603)
Social class					
AB	30	55	68	66	(217)
C1	30	59	64	53	(284)
C2	25	54	62	60	(306)
D	32	54	47	39	(155)
E	33	48	57	56	(176)
Activity status					
working	25	55	62	56	(651)
not working	35	53	59	54	(488)
All respondents	30	54	61	56	(1,144)

Table 2.10 shows the distribution of replies by locational characteristics, and here some strong differences begin to emerge. Those living in council accommodation, for example, are better informed about their local representatives than are owner occupiers and are generally almost as well informed about the political

control of councils. The importance of length of residence begins to show up on these questions, notwithstanding our doubts on the accuracy of replies to the residence question. Those who had lived in the locality for five years or more were substantially better informed about local politics. We also see in this table a surprising relationship between political knowledge and ratepaying. Although the numbers of people who maintain that their household does not pay rates is small, the non- or part-ratepayers appear as a group to be notably more knowledgeable about local politics than those who pay rates in full. It is of course possible that some of those claiming to pay rates in full (a slightly higher proportion, as we have seen from Table 1.2, than in fact does so) answered in ignorance of their true situation, an ignorance also reflected in their lower levels of knowledge.

TABLE 2.10

All respondents

Ability to name local councillor and identify (i) their party, and (ii) party in control of the local and county/regional councils by locational characteristics.

	correct name of local councillor	correct party of local councillor	correct controlling party, local council	correct controlling party, county/ regional council	base
	%	%	%	%	
Housing tenure					
owner occupier	30	53	62	57	(815)
council tenant	32	62	62	53	(234)
Length of residence					
up to 5 years	17	41	54	48	(254)
5 years or more	33	58	63	58	(890)
Region					
London	15	50	68	77	(123)
metropolitan England	22	62	80	72	(235)
rest of England and Wales	33	51	53	45	(677)
Scotland	42	62	62	62	(108)
Ratepaying					
pays rates in full	30	53	62	56	(812)
rates partly rebated	37	59	61	57	(118)
does not pay rates	28	66	68	62	(122)
All respondents	30	54	61	56	(1,144)

Also of interest in Table 2.10 are the regional differences. A surprising 42% of the Scottish respondents could correctly name their local councillor, and a third

of those living in non-metropolitan England and Wales. But only 15% of Londoners could do so; 77% of Londoners (by far the highest proportion) did not know: few simply guessed wrongly. That those living in England and Wales outside the metropolitan areas begin to fall below the average figures for correct answers to the "party" questions is explicable in terms of the question form itself. A proportion of those respondents will be represented by independent councillors, and a few will live in non-partisan areas. While they had the option to reply "independent" the question form may have prompted the high proportion of "don't know" responses that were made in these areas.

Turning to the attitudinal divisions shown in Table 2.11, we find that less of interest emerges. The knowledge advantage that those who oppose party politics in local government displayed on the earlier questions here disappears, there being effectively no difference in their scores and those of the "partisans". The striking relationship that does emerge concerns the association between voting and political knowledge. Those who claim to have voted at the last local election and who intend to vote at the next are considerably better informed about all aspects of local politics than the occasional and non-voters. Those who do vote have, at least on these remarkable figures, a clear picture of what and who they are voting for.

TABLE 2.11

All respondents

Ability to name local councillor and identify (i) their party, and (ii) party in control of the local and county/regional councils, by selected attitudinal characteristics.					
	correct name of local councillor	correct party of local councillor	correct controlling party, local council	correct controlling party, county/ regional council	base
	%	%	%	%	
Party identification					
Conservative	28	56	67	60	(359)
Labour	31	57	59	55	(390)
Alliance	34	55	64	58	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship					
prefer party system	32	58	62	57	(393)
prefer non-party system	30	56	63	58	(593)
Participation in elections					
habitual voter	40	68	69	65	(557)
occasional voter	22	45	57	47	(379)
non-voter	14	27	37	32	(114)
All respondents	30	54	61	56	(1,144)

CONTACT WITH THE COUNCILS

Like most other aspects of life, knowledge and activity in respect of local affairs tend to reinforce one another. We were therefore interested to discover the extent to which our respondents had ever had personal contact with their councillor or with the council offices, and the relationship between levels of contact and levels of knowledge about local government. We were also interested to know whether any association exists between the propensity to vote in local elections, and the degree of contact which the respondent has had with the council.

Two kinds of question were asked about contact with the council. First we asked our respondents whether they had "ever wanted to complain about something [the local council] had done or failed to do" (Q.17a). The extent to which they had wanted to complain, and had actually done so, and about what, is the subject matter of Chapter 4. At this stage we are interested only in those to whom actual complainants complained: that is, whether they complained to their councillor, or to the council offices. But we also asked those who had *not* complained whether they had ever *contacted* a councillor (Q.22) or the council office (Q.26) "by phone, visit, or letter". The extent to which the outcomes of those contacts were deemed satisfactory is a matter for Chapter 3. For the moment, taking these two types of question together, we have some measure of the extent of the contact (complaining and otherwise) between people and their local councils.

The most fruitful relationships to explore are those between the particular locational circumstances of the respondents and the degree of their contact with the local authority. Table 2.12 shows the patterns of contact with both councillors and council offices by the standard locational variables of housing tenure, length of residence, region and ratepaying. Overall one-fifth of our respondents have contacted their councillor either to complain or for some other reason, while half have been in contact with their council offices. The variations in the proportions having had contact at official level are not great, although the low Scottish figures are surprising, the low levels of contact among non-ratepayers less so.

The variations in contact with councillors are more striking. Council tenants are considerably more likely than any other social group to have initiated contact with their councillor, reflecting the predominance of housing issues among the many reasons for contact which were cited. Those who have resided in their area for five years or more are more likely to have had such contact than the relative newcomers. Particularly notable in this table is the small proportion of Londoners who have been in touch with their councillors; this of course corresponds with the relative inability of Londoners to name their councillors (see Table 2.10) and probably reflects in part the transience of sections of the inner London population.

Table 2.13 displays the relationships between the respondents' contact levels and the extent to which they are informed about local government, and between contact and electoral participation. These findings show the better-informed respondent to be far more likely to be in contact with both councillors and officials.

The association between voting behaviour and contact also merits attention. The non-voters (who, as we shall see, overlap considerably with the least well informed electors) have had little contact with even their council offices, while the relationship between the propensity to vote and contact with councillors is particularly marked. We see here some further evidence of the active citizen, who has high levels of knowledge and a strong propensity to be involved in local politics both at the polls and in an individual capacity.

TABLE 2.12

All respondents

**Extent of contact with councillors and council offices
by locational characteristics**

	contact with councillor	contact with council offices	base
	%	%	
Housing tenure			
owner occupier	18	50	(815)
council tenant	32	47	(234)
Length of residence			
up to 5 years	11	44	(254)
5 years or more	24	50	(890)
Region			
London	14	49	(123)
metropolitan England	20	52	(235)
rest of England and Wales	22	50	(677)
Scotland	21	32	(108)
Ratepaying			
pays rates in full	23	53	(812)
rates partly rebated	25	50	(118)
does not pay rates	18	43	(122)
All respondents	20	49	(1,144)

TABLE 2.13

All respondents

**Extent of contact with councillors and council offices,
by level of knowledge and electoral participation**

	contact with councillor	contact with council offices	base
	%	%	
Knowledge of local government			
well-informed	37	64	(209)
quite well-informed	23	53	(387)
not very well-informed	15	42	(407)
uninformed	6	33	(141)
Participation in elections			
habitual voter	27	53	(557)
occasional voter	16	49	(379)
non-voter	11	39	(114)
All respondents	20	49	(1,144)

CHAPTER 3

SATISFACTION WITH LOCAL SERVICES

Having established the extent to which our respondents were knowledgeable about local government, and had been in contact with their local authorities, we were concerned to discover how satisfied or dissatisfied they were, both with the services themselves, and with the direct contact that they had made with councillors and officers. We begin in this chapter with the level of general satisfaction with how well the respective local councils "run things". We then examine the extent to which our respondents were satisfied with a number of local services. Finally, we look at the levels of satisfaction with councillors and officers, confining ourselves in this case to that sub-group of the sample who had actually been in contact with their council.

THE GENERAL LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

We begin with the responses to Questions 4a and 4b, in which we asked the respondents to say whether, "on the whole", they thought that the county or regional and local councils "run things very well, fairly well, or not at all well". The distribution of replies for all respondents shown at the foot of Tables 3.1 to 3.3 indicates a very high general level of satisfaction with local government. More than 70% of all the respondents were satisfied with the performance of both levels of local government, with slightly more reservation being expressed, in general, about the local councils. Table 3.1 indicates a slight tendency for older people to be more critical, particularly of the local councils, and a fairly marked propensity for people in the higher social class groupings to be more satisfied with local government. Again, this relationship is more marked for the local than for the county/regional councils. In part, the differences between the two levels of government are attributable to the slightly higher proportion of people having no view about the county or region than about the local council, a reflection of the tendency noted in the previous chapter for county and regional government to be slightly less well understood.

Table 3.2 shows that owner occupiers have a considerably more positive evaluation of local government than do those who live in council accommodation. It also shows that people who live outside the metropolitan areas in England and Wales have an above-average level of satisfaction with their councils. The most negative evaluations of the local authorities are to be found in the metropolitan areas, and to a lesser extent in Greater London, with around a quarter of the respondents considering that their local authorities were running local affairs "not at all well".

Some interesting relationships between personal attitudes and satisfaction with local government are displayed in Table 3.3. Despite the very limited extent to which the Alliance parties have political control of local authorities, their supporters are rather more satisfied with local government than are those of the major parties. This is however largely a reflection of the higher social status and educational level of Alliance supporters, factors which tend to incline the respondent towards a more favourable view of local government. The better-

TABLE 3.1

All respondents

General satisfaction with county/regional and local councils, by age, sex, social class and activity status

		county/regional council runs things:		local council runs things:		
		“very” or “fairly” well	“not at all” well	“very” or “fairly” well	“not at all” well	base
Age						
18-34	%	75	14	74	16	(360)
35-54	%	74	17	72	23	(400)
55-64	%	63	25	66	26	(164)
65 and over	%	69	15	70	21	(210)
Sex						
men	%	75	18	71	23	(537)
women	%	71	15	71	19	(603)
Social class						
AB	%	74	13	76	18	(217)
C1	%	75	15	76	17	(284)
C2	%	71	17	69	21	(306)
D	%	74	18	68	22	(155)
E	%	63	21	62	29	(176)
Activity status						
working	%	73	16	73	18	(651)
not working	%	70	17	68	24	(488)
All respondents	%	72	16	71	21	(1,144)

informed elector is likely to express both stronger satisfaction and dissatisfaction with his or her local authorities; this is in part because the less well-informed are less likely to have a view, and recorded more "don't knows" in response to these questions.

TABLE 3.2

All respondents

General satisfaction with county/regional and local councils, by locational characteristics

		county/regional council runs things:		local council runs things:		base
		"very" or "fairly" well	"not at all" well	"very" or "fairly" well	"not at all" well	
Housing tenure						
owner occupier	%	74	15	75	20	(815)
council tenant	%	63	20	61	26	(234)
Length of residence						
up to 5 years	%	70	11	68	15	(254)
5 years or more	%	72	18	72	22	(890)
Region						
London	%	70	18	64	25	(123)
metropolitan						
England	%	62	24	60	27	(235)
rest of England						
and Wales	%	76	13	77	17	(677)
Scotland	%	68	20	68	22	(108)
Ratepaying						
pays rates in full	%	73	16	73	19	(812)
rates partly						
rebated	%	76	16	68	25	(118)
does not pay rates	%	59	19	60	27	(122)
All respondents	%	72	16	71	21	(1,144)

TABLE 3.3

All respondents

General satisfaction with county/regional and local councils, by selected attitudinal characteristics

		county/regional council runs things:		local council runs things:		
		“very” or “fairly” well	“not at all” well	“very” or “fairly” well	“not at all” well	base
Party identification						
Conservative	%	71	16	72	20	(359)
Labour	%	74	15	71	19	(390)
Alliance	%	79	17	77	20	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship						
prefer party system	%	74	15	76	16	(393)
prefer non-party system	%	72	18	69	25	(593)
Knowledge of local government						
well-informed	%	71	24	74	25	(209)
quite well- informed	%	76	15	73	21	(387)
not very well- informed	%	73	11	71	18	(407)
uninformed	%	57	24	62	21	(141)
Participation in elections						
habitual voter	%	75	17	72	22	(557)
occasional voter	%	69	16	70	19	(379)
non-voter	%	66	18	69	25	(114)
All respondents	%	72	16	71	21	(1,144)

We constructed the "political sympathy" code described in Chapter 1 in the expectation that peoples' view of their local authorities might reflect something of the extent to which they shared or did not share the political inclinations of the controlling party in the area where they lived. Table 3.4 shows that there is indeed such a relationship among majority party supporters but it is very much weaker overall than intuition would suggest. In itself the weakness of this association is a helpful finding, for it implies that respondents' views on other aspects of local government are not unduly coloured by political antagonism towards or support for their local council. However, the upper four rows of the table show why this is so.

TABLE 3.4

Major party supporters

General satisfaction with local councils by political sympathy				
		local council runs things:		
		“very” or “fairly” well	“not at all” well	base
Conservative in Conservative locality	%	72	14	(143)
Conservative in non-Conservative locality	%	63	20	(217)
Labour in Labour locality	%	65	16	(195)
Labour in non-Labour locality	%	70	20	(198)
Politically sympathetic to local council	%	68	15	(338)
Politically unsympathetic to local council	%	66	21	(415)
All				(753)

Conservative supporters are considerably more positive about their own local council in those areas where it is controlled by the Conservative party. But Labour voters are slightly *less* positive about Labour controlled authorities than about those under other, or no control. Some part of the explanation of this odd finding may lie in the social class composition of the two groups of residents, those living in Labour and other non-Conservative areas having slightly less representation of the higher status groups, and therefore a higher propensity to make negative judgements or no judgement at all about their local council. The sub-group of party identifiers to whom Table 3.4 refers, while a substantial proportion of the entire sample, is nonetheless unrepresentative of it. Table 3.5 shows that these partisan differences in satisfaction with local authorities of different political colours are not reflected in the sample as a whole. There is *no* significant difference between people who live in Labour and Conservative areas as regards their satisfaction with local government. The smaller number who live in an area controlled by another party or by none register rather higher levels of satisfaction.

TABLE 3.5

All respondents

General satisfaction with councils, by party control of local council

	Conservative districts	Labour districts	"Other" or non-party districts
	%	%	%
County and district run things well	60	57	72
County runs things well, district does not	10	10	5
District runs things well, county does not	6	5	4
Neither runs things well	8	12	7
Base	(427)	(532)	(185)

SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES

Having asked the respondents whether they could identify the agency responsible for providing each of ten public services, we then asked them (Q.6) to say for each of the seven that are in local government hands, how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the way the services were provided in their area. The services concerned were schools, council housing, street cleaning, home helps for the elderly, rubbish collection, development control (or "dealing with planning applications") and the fire service. Table 3.6 shows the distribution of "satisfied" and "dissatisfied" responses for the sample as a whole. It will be noted that while only moderate proportions of the respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, considerable numbers had no view at all about those services that impinge only tangentially upon the public at large.

It is not profitable to analyse those services on which so many people appear to have no view, and we have excluded home helps and development control—in both of which cases only a minority of people were able to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction—from Table 3.7. For the five services that remain the breakdown by locational characteristic is given, and it is immediately apparent that there are some quite sharp divisions among the sample when it is broken down in this way. There are for example considerable differences in the ways in which owner occupiers and council tenants regard council housing. Something more than half of the latter are satisfied with local housing provision. But it is likely that the two tenure groups were responding to different questions here: the council tenants are most likely to have replied in terms of their satisfaction with their own home, while the responses of owner occupiers may have turned upon physical and environmental—or indeed social—images evoked by the term "council housing".

TABLE 3.6

All respondents

Satisfaction with seven local government services					
		"very" or "fairly" satisfied	neither	"fairly" or "very" dissatisfied	don't know
schools	%	54	11	17	19
council housing	%	39	18	18	26
street cleaning	%	67	6	26	1
home helps for the elderly	%	37	15	9	39
rubbish collection	%	87	2	10	1
dealing with planning applications	%	32	16	9	43
fire service	%	77	6	0	16

0 = less than 0.5%.

TABLE 3.7

All respondents

Satisfaction with five local government services by locational characteristics						
	"very" or "fairly" satisfied with					base
	schools	council housing	street cleaning	rubbish collection	fire service	
	%	%	%	%	%	
Housing tenure						
owner occupier	53	35	67	87	78	(815)
council tenant	56	57	66	86	79	(234)
Length of residence						
up to 5 years	42	30	75	85	60	(254)
5 years or more	57	41	64	86	83	(890)
Region						
London	44	29	53	81	71	(123)
metropolitan England	49	33	66	84	76	(235)
rest of England and Wales	56	41	68	89	80	(677)
Scotland	57	41	78	80	76	(108)
Ratepaying						
pays rates in full	55	39	69	88	78	(812)
rates partly rebated	51	44	64	92	83	(118)
does not pay rates	39	33	63	78	78	(122)
All respondents	54	39	67	87	77	(1,144)

Also notable are interesting distinctions between the services made by those who have lived in an area for five years or more and the relative newcomers. But the most striking finding is surely the relatively low levels of satisfaction expressed by those respondents living in London and in the other metropolitan areas in respect of the principal local services, schools and housing. Regrettably, the numbers in these regional groups are too small to permit any finer-grained analysis.

In Table 3.8 we return to the associations between satisfaction and political sympathy. In this case, however, the range of services considered is further narrowed to those which are district-level functions, for the sympathy code refers to the political complexion of that level of local government only. In this instance, the evaluations of particular services are rather more sensitive to political sympathy, for the general tendency of Labour supporters in non-Labour areas to make more favourable evaluations is not apparent. Rubbish collection appears to be viewed in a wholly non-partisan fashion, while the respondents' views of the remaining services show some small correspondence with political sympathy. This is a cautionary finding, as public satisfaction studies do not usually discriminate between respondents according to their local political circumstances in this way.

TABLE 3.8

Major party supporters

Satisfaction with three local government services by political sympathy				
	"very" or "fairly" satisfied with			base
	council housing	street cleaning	rubbish collection	
	%	%	%	
Conservative in Conservative locality	39	70	91	(143)
Conservative in non-Conservative locality	37	67	88	(217)
Labour in Labour locality	48	73	86	(195)
Labour in non-Labour locality	37	64	87	(198)
Politically sympathetic to local council	44	72	88	(338)
Politically unsympathetic to local council	36	66	87	(415)
All				(753)

SATISFACTION WITH COUNCILLORS AND OFFICERS

The previous chapter documented the extent to which our respondents had been in touch with their local council, either to complain about something it had or

had not done, or for some other reason. Table 3.9 shows clearly that the sense of satisfaction felt by the respondent is shaped by the spirit in which they contacted the council. Those who went simply to take up an issue were generally more satisfied, three-quarters of those who contacted a councillor being content with the outcome, and two-thirds of that rather larger number who dealt directly with council officers. Complainants were less successful. Two-thirds of those who saw an officer were dissatisfied, and only a quarter satisfied. On the other hand, those who complained to their councillor were almost equally divided about the outcome.

TABLE 3.9 Respondents who had contacted or complained to council

Satisfaction with outcome of contact with council				
		satisfaction with the way councillor or council officers dealt with the matter		base
		"very" or "fairly" satisfied	"fairly" or "very" dissatisfied	
complained to councillor	%	43	48	(100)
complained to council officers	%	26	66	(183)
contacted councillor	%	74	22	(136)
contacted council office	%	68	26	(372)
All				(791)

Table 3.10 combines those who had complained to and those who had merely made contact with the council, and makes no distinction between whether they saw a councillor or an official. Instead, the sub-set of respondents "in contact" with their councils is broken down by region. It will be seen that within each type of local authority system around half of the respondents were satisfied with the outcome of their contact with the council. The differences between regions are not great, and the numbers in some of the categories counsel against imaginative interpretation. By and large, however, those living under the shire county and district system appear to be slightly more satisfied with their experiences with their local councils than those living elsewhere.

TABLE 3.10

Respondents who had contacted or complained to council

Satisfaction with outcome of contact with council, by region			
		satisfaction with the way councillor or council officers dealt with the matter	
		"very" or "fairly" satisfied	base
London	%	52	(77)
metropolitan England	%	56	(170)
rest of England and Wales	%	58	(485)
Scotland	%	47	(58)
All			(790)

CHAPTER 4

COMPLAINING AND CHALLENGING

In this chapter we look more closely at that sub-set of the sample who had some experience of complaining to their local council. We look first at the distribution of complainant among our key social groups, and at the varying propensities of different kinds of people to complain. We look briefly at the subject matter of those complaints and at the reasons given by those who wanted to complain and yet had not done so. We then return to the sample as a whole, and explore the responses to our hypothetical question about what people would do if faced by a local council which was proposing a "really wrong" scheme. Here we explore the pattern of challenges that people claim they would make, first in general terms, and then in some detail with breakdowns by several social groups.

COMPLAINTS TO THE LOCAL COUNCIL

We asked a series of questions about complaining to the local council. We began (Q.16) by asking "Have you ever wanted to complain about something [local] council has done or failed to do?" We followed this with an open-ended question about the nature of the issue, and then asked whether or not the respondent had actually complained. Those who had done so were asked (Q.20) to whom they complained and (as we have already discussed) how satisfied they were with the way in which that person or body had dealt with the matter. Those who had not complained were asked why they had not done so.

We deal first with *who* complained. Tables 4.1 to 4.3 show the distribution of those who have ever wanted to complain, and of actual complainants between the three basic categories of social group. The third column in each of these three tables shows the probability of complaint for each group. Because the desire to complain is unevenly distributed among the groups, some measure of comparison is necessary by which the desire to complain can be related to an actual complaint. The probability of complaining is an index of the extent to which people in these various groups actually took their grievance. The maximum possible score is 1, which would be reached if every possible complainant in the group in question complained. Many do not, and the foot of Table 4.1 shows the overall probability to be 0.62—that is, for every hundred people in the sample who ever wished to complain, 62 did so.

Table 4.1 shows the breakdown of potential and actual complaints and the probability scores by the personal attributes of the respondents themselves. It is once again middle-aged people who are the most likely to have wanted to complain, but in this case the oldest groups are the most likely to actually have done so. The age-relationship with complaining is stronger than that which obtains for the other personal attributes.

Table 4.2 shows the associations of complaining with the locational attributes of the respondents. The variations are a little wider here. We see, for example, that owner occupiers are slightly more likely to have wanted to complain than council tenants but that council tenants have a far higher probability of actually com-

TABLE 4.1

All respondents

Complaints to the local council by age, sex, social class and activity status				
	ever wanted to complain %	did complain %	probability of complaining %	base
Age				
18-34	38	20	0.53	(360)
35-54	48	31	0.65	(400)
55-64	45	28	0.62	(164)
65 and over	39	28	0.72	(210)
Sex				
men	44	27	0.61	(537)
women	41	25	0.61	(603)
Social class				
AB	43	28	0.65	(217)
C1	47	26	0.55	(284)
C2	45	29	0.64	(306)
D	37	23	0.62	(155)
E	34	24	0.71	(176)
Activity status				
working	44	27	0.61	(651)
not working	40	25	0.63	(488)
All respondents	42	26	0.62	(1,144)

plaining, no doubt because of their better access to the local authority; housing questions do feature prominently among complaint issues. We see also that the Scots felt they had less to complain about than people living in England and Wales, but were slightly more likely than the average to have done so. Londoners have a relatively high level of dissatisfaction, and a higher propensity to complain; as many as a third of all our London respondents claimed to have complained to their local authority. People living in the shires were as likely as anyone else to have wanted to complain but were less likely to have done so.

Table 4.3 gives the breakdown by some of the attitudinal characteristics, and interesting associations emerge in respect of almost all the variables. Conservative supporters are slightly more aggrieved, but are markedly less likely to complain. Labour supporters appear to be the most assertive. Those who are opposed to party politics in local government are more likely to feel the wish to complain, but are less likely to do so than those who feel the party system is preferable. The better-informed the respondent, the more likely he or she is to have wanted to complain. This is a strong relationship, but the actual propensity to complain is rather less strongly related to knowledge of local government. The clearest relationship is the least surprising, with the degree of satisfaction with local government (which is in this case shown only for the local council). Those

TABLE 4.2

All respondents

Complaints to the local council by locational characteristics				
	ever wanted to complain %	did complain %	probability of complaining %	base
Housing tenure				
owner occupier	44	26	0.59	(815)
council tenant	41	31	0.76	(234)
Length of residence				
up to 5 years	33	19	0.58	(254)
5 years or more	45	28	0.62	(890)
Region				
London	49	34	0.69	(123)
metropolitan England	43	29	0.67	(235)
rest of England and Wales	43	25	0.58	(677)
Scotland	31	20	0.65	(108)
Ratepaying				
pays rates in full	43	27	0.63	(812)
rates partly rebated	45	32	0.71	(118)
does not pay rates	40	25	0.63	(122)
All respondents	42	26	0.62	(1,144)

who are generally dissatisfied are very much more likely to have wanted to complain, and are more likely still to have actually done so. There is of course an element of circularity here, for the level of satisfaction with the local council is more likely to have been shaped by a (typically unsatisfactory) experience of complaining than by any other single factor.

TABLE 4.3

All respondents

Complaints to the local council by selected attitudinal characteristics				
	ever wanted to complain	did complain	probability of complaining	base
	%	%	%	
Party identification				
Conservative	44	24	0.55	(359)
Labour	42	29	0.69	(390)
Alliance	42	27	0.64	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship				
prefer party system	40	25	0.63	(393)
prefer non-party system	46	28	0.61	(593)
Knowledge of local government				
well-informed	54	36	0.67	(209)
quite well-informed	46	29	0.63	(387)
not very well-informed	37	21	0.57	(407)
uninformed	30	19	0.63	(141)
Satisfaction with local council				
local council runs things				
"very" or "fairly well"	39	22	0.56	(760)
"not at all" well	61	45	0.74	(219)
Participation in elections				
habitual voter	45	31	0.69	(557)
occasional voter	42	24	0.57	(379)
non-voter	35	22	0.63	(114)
All respondents	42	26	0.62	(1,144)

Table 4.4 gives a breakdown of the issues about which people had wanted to complain. We did not collect information about the subjects of *actual* complaints and so only limited inferences can be drawn from this table. It is most usefully read in conjunction with Table 4.5, which lists the principal reasons given by those respondents who wished to complain but who did not do so. It will be seen that less than a third of the possible complaints concerned the respondent or the respondent's family only, and it is probable that most of the housing issues fell into this category. Half of the issues were "public matters" which in most cases probably concerned people in the immediate locality (planning issues, traffic and parking). But Table 4.5 shows that among those who wished to complain and didn't, about half of the reasons cited reflect insufficient strength of feeling, while around a third reflect a sense of personal incapacity or pessimism that could well have co-existed with quite strong feelings about the issue in question.

TABLE 4.4

All respondents who ever wanted to complain

Subject matter of complaints to the local council	
	ever wanted to complain %
council housing/rents	21
rates	3
planning	10
education	4
street cleaning/refuse	15
social services	—
roads/traffic/parking	23
vandalism	4
other	28
not stated	3
matter concerned respondent and family only	30
matter concerned other people as well	51
Base	(485)

TABLE 4.5

All respondents who wanted to complain but did not

Reasons for not complaining	
	given as reason ¹ %
there was no point/nothing would be done/they would not listen	29
never got around to it/no time	17
couldn't be bothered/too lazy	14
friend/neighbour/member of family complained instead	10
did not know where to go/how to go about it	8
person concerned would have had to have complained	4
it was sorted out anyway	3
did not feel that strongly/there are more important issues	3
other answers	13
don't know/not answered	4
Base	(182)

¹ multiple answers possible.

Table 4.6 shows to whom the complainers complained. Almost two-thirds did so to the council offices and exactly a third to their councillor. There was no other single significant recipient of these complaints.

TABLE 4.6 All respondents who actually complained

Recipients of complaints about the local council	
	complaints %
local councillor	33
council officers	61
own MP	4
Minister/Government	1
district auditor ¹	0
ombudsman ¹	—
newspaper/TV	2
other	20
can't remember	3
Base	(301)

¹ in the case of the district auditor and ombudsman the actual number of complaints are known from other sources. In 1984/85 some 750 complaints were made to the auditor and some 4,000 to the ombudsman.

CHALLENGING "REALLY WRONG" DECISIONS

Following the set of questions about contact and complaint we asked all respondents (at Q.30a) to suppose that their local council was proposing a scheme which they thought was "really wrong", and to choose from a showcard as many courses of action as they thought they might adopt in protest. The choices offered amount to a modified version of a question asked in a number of social attitude surveys and which has proved to discriminate particularly well between social groups. In this case, we also asked the respondents to say which one of the several courses of action offered they thought would prove the most effective "in influencing your local council to change its mind" (Q.30b).

Table 4.7 lists the complete range of actions which we offered, and the distribution of the choices among them, along with the single most effective course of action. We cannot of course be quite sure what kind of scheme would be taken to be "really wrong", nor in what sense. It is striking therefore that the pattern of choices bears little relationship to the pattern of complaints shown in the previous table. It would seem that elected members at both the council and Parliamentary level are seen as the most important focus of protest, and the second column shows that more people felt the local MP to be an effective avenue through which to challenge such a decision than any other. The high proportion willing to sign a petition is consonant with the findings of other surveys, as is the low proportion thinking this to be a particularly effective form of dissent. One

fifth of the respondents would vote against the existing councillors at election time, but very few thought that an effective way of stopping an already proposed scheme.

TABLE 4.7

All respondents

Actions to be taken when faced with a "really wrong" council decision and "most effective" action

	would take ¹	most effective
	%	%
Respondent would contact:		
councillor	49	18
council officers	28	4
ombudsman	8	3
MP	47	22
district auditor	2	1
local newspaper/radio	25	15
other people	4	1
Other actions:		
sign petition	53	12
go on protest demonstration	7	1
take council to court	6	4
vote against council	19	4
Other	2	1
None of these	4	6
Don't know	3	9
Base		(1,144)

¹ multiple responses.

The potential value of this question is realised when we sort from among the several responses those avenues that require the respondent to take some personal initiative to challenge a local decision and which hold some reasonable prospect of success: the councillors, the officers, the local MP and the local press and radio. Tables 4.8 to 4.10 show the distributions of these favoured avenues among the three basic sets of social groups. It should be borne in mind that these were multiple responses and that this presentation of the findings does not bring out the extent to which different people would choose to pursue fewer or more of these avenues. Past research leads us to expect the middle-aged, higher status and better educated respondents to adopt several such avenues of challenge at the same time.

Table 4.8 shows that the propensity to use any of these channels increases with social status, but more markedly for resort to the local MP and to the media. Although the likelihood of working class people protesting in any of these ways is lower, the traditional local government channels remain relatively more accessible to them. It is also notable that younger people are relatively more likely to appeal to the MP or to take the matter up with the local media.

TABLE 4.8

All respondents

Avenues of challenge to "really wrong" council decisions, by age, sex, social class and activity status

	contact councillor %	contact officers %	contact MP %	contact local media %	base
Age					
18-34	49	26	53	29	(360)
35-54	48	31	49	29	(400)
55-64	53	30	49	21	(164)
65 and over	49	21	31	12	(210)
Sex					
men	52	29	49	26	(537)
women	46	26	45	24	(603)
Social class					
AB	58	38	55	37	(217)
C1	54	30	54	22	(284)
C2	48	23	46	25	(306)
D	41	22	44	23	(155)
E	39	23	30	16	(176)
Activity status					
working	50	29	53	30	(651)
not working	47	25	39	19	(488)
All respondents	49	28	47	25	(1,144)

Table 4.9 shows that owner occupiers are more likely to protest through any of these channels (although, as we have seen, they are in practice less likely to complain); that those who have lived in their area for less than five years are more likely to appeal to their MP than to use other channels; and that Londoners are particularly unlikely to approach their councillors on such a matter. Possibly because of the extent to which the national institutions of governance have tended to eclipse London local government, Londoners show a very strong preference for their MP over their local councillor.

TABLE 4.9

All respondents

Avenues of challenge to "really wrong" council decisions, by locational characteristics

	contact councillor %	contact officers %	contact MP %	contact local media %	base
Housing tenure					
owner occupier	52	30	51	26	(815)
council tenant	43	18	37	18	(234)
Length of residence					
up to 5 years	48	28	54	30	(254)
5 years or more	49	28	45	23	(890)
Region					
London	35	34	53	21	(123)
metropolitan					
England	48	29	49	36	(235)
rest of England and					
Wales	53	27	47	23	(677)
Scotland	44	20	33	17	(108)
Ratepaying					
pays rates in full	51	30	50	26	(812)
rates partly rebated	50	17	42	16	(118)
does not pay rates	42	29	43	27	(122)
All respondents	49	28	47	25	(1,144)

Table 4.10 presents the breakdown by attitudinal attributes. Strongest among the associations shown there is that with levels of knowledge about local government. We might expect the relatively well-informed to have a higher propensity to use any of the available avenues of challenge to unwelcome local decisions but that 72% of them would approach their councillor is a striking finding, for their readiness to use other means is only modestly, if consistently, higher than the average for all respondents.

TABLE 4.10

All respondents

Avenues of challenge to "really wrong" council decisions by selected attitudinal characteristics					
	contact councillor	contact officers	contact MP	contact local media	base
	%	%	%	%	
Party identification					
Conservative	54	29	58	24	(359)
Labour	49	26	42	24	(390)
Alliance	49	32	42	29	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship					
prefer party system	47	24	47	23	(393)
prefer non-party system	53	29	50	28	(593)
Knowledge of local government					
well-informed	72	33	55	31	(209)
quite well-informed	53	29	50	27	(387)
not very well-informed	39	28	44	24	(407)
uninformed	31	14	34	14	(141)
Participation in elections					
habitual voter	56	30	49	25	(557)
occasional voter	44	26	46	26	(379)
non-voter	30	26	38	18	(114)
All respondents	49	28	47	25	(1,144)

In Table 4.11 we return to the question of how far complaint and protest is a function of political dislike for the council in question. Again, Conservative respondents provide expectable answers, for they are considerably more likely to appeal to the councillor and to the local MP in Conservative areas than in non-Conservative, while "unsympathetic" Conservatives are more likely to contact the local media than in areas where their party has a political majority. Labour supporters remain a paradox, being more likely to contact the local media when they live in Labour controlled areas than when they live under a non-Labour local council. These differences are sufficient to moderate, but not to obliterate, the generally greater tendency for those who live in areas where the local council is of the same political colour as themselves to appeal to their locally elected representatives when faced with some proposal that they think "really wrong".

TABLE 4.11

Major party supporters

Avenues of challenge to "really wrong" council decisions by political sympathy					
	contact councillor	contact officers	contact MP	contact local media	base
	%	%	%	%	
Conservative in Conservative locality	59	32	63	22	(143)
Conservative in non-Conservative locality	50	26	54	26	(217)
Labour in Labour locality	51	24	40	29	(195)
Labour in non- Labour locality	47	29	43	18	(198)
Politically sympathetic to local council	54	28	50	26	(338)
Politically unsympathetic to local council	49	27	49	22	(415)
All					(753)

CHAPTER 5

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In this chapter we consider the respondents' views on a range of issues concerning the role of locally-elected councils in the governmental system. We asked a number of questions, covering the range of powers and duties thought appropriate to local government, the respective roles of the local authority and the local Member of Parliament in promoting the interests of the area, the desirability of local government being replaced by central appointees, the extent of local government's actual autonomy, and the degree of central control over local government that does, and should, exist.

THE SCOPE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

We put it to our respondents (Q.8) that "people have different views on what local councils should or should not do" and asked, for a range of services, "whether local councils should be required to do them, or should they be allowed to do them if they wish, or should they not be allowed to do them?". The services are listed in Table 5.1. They were chosen to include some that are traditional mandatory duties (roads, parks and housing) and some that are permissive powers in more innovative areas (play groups, grants to voluntary organisations and job creation).

TABLE 5.1

All respondents

The powers and duties of local councils				
		local councils should:		
		have to do	be allowed to do	not be allowed to do
maintain road surfaces	%	77	16	6
provide play groups for very young children	%	48	43	6
give grants to voluntary organisations	%	17	58	17
provide council housing	%	81	15	2
provide parks and open spaces	%	77	19	2
spend money to create jobs in the area	%	59	29	8
Base				(1,144)

As can be seen the great majority of respondents thought that all these services were the legitimate subject of local government activity. Also a majority considered that the three traditional services that are at present mandatory duties *should* be mandatory. Interestingly a majority thought that job creation should also be a mandatory duty. This indicates the very high priority attached to

tackling unemployment, which was also demonstrated in the replies to the "most important issue" question (Q.13a, not analysed here).

We then asked (Q.9) whether our respondents thought that "local councils should be involved in trying to get the best deal for the area from the government" or "that should be left to the MP". Table 5.2 shows the distribution of responses to this question by age, sex, social class and activity status. Overall, one-third of the respondents thought the promotion of an area's interests to be a matter for the local MP, while almost all the remainder thought it something in which the local council should be involved. It was a matter on which very few people could not state a view and there is a fairly evident, if mild, association of support for the local authority role with youth and with higher social status.

TABLE 5.2

All respondents

Local councils and MPs as promoters of local interests, by age, sex, social class and activity status				
		local council should be involved	it should be left to the MP	base
Age				
18-34	%	63	29	(360)
35-54	%	65	30	(400)
55-64	%	52	41	(164)
65 and over	%	59	32	(210)
Sex				
men	%	64	31	(537)
women	%	58	33	(603)
Social Class				
AB	%	68	28	(217)
C1	%	61	32	(284)
C2	%	60	34	(306)
D	%	61	30	(155)
E	%	54	35	(176)
Activity status				
working	%	64	30	(651)
not working	%	56	35	(488)
All respondents	%	61	32	(1,144)

Tables 5.3 to 5.5 show the breakdown of responses to this same question by locational and attitudinal characteristics. The overall picture is one of relative stability of view, with the most notable feature of Table 5.3 being the relatively slight (and of course class-associated) support to the local authority role given by council tenants. It is unlikely that this is in reality a "locational" response. Table 5.4, which should be read alongside it, shows a strong correspondence between support for the local authority as promoter of an area's interests and higher

levels of knowledge about local government. While these findings are still worth reporting here, it is possible that the question tapped degrees of comprehension of just what activities a local authority could engage in, as much as views of the role of local government itself.

TABLE 5.3

All respondents

Local councils and MPs as promoters of local interests, by locational characteristics				
		local council should be involved	it should be left to the MP	base
Housing tenure				
owner occupier	%	63	31	(815)
council tenant	%	54	34	(234)
Length of residence				
up to 5 years	%	61	29	(254)
5 years or over	%	61	33	(890)
Region				
London	%	61	27	(123)
metropolitan England	%	66	29	(235)
rest of England and Wales	%	60	34	(677)
Scotland	%	57	34	(108)
Ratepaying				
pays rates in full	%	64	29	(812)
rates partly rebated	%	52	44	(118)
does not pay rates	%	66	28	(122)
All respondents	%	61	32	(1,144)

This judgement might however be qualified by the indications of a modest division between the supporters of the two major parties. Table 5.4 suggests that Conservatives are slightly—but only slightly—less enthusiastic about the local authority playing a role in promoting local interests. Table 5.5 examines the views of major party supporters according to the political colour of the local councils in whose areas they live. There are indications here that Conservative support is less enthusiastic still in non-Conservative areas. The attitude of Labour supporters is, however, not affected by the political control of their council.

TABLE 5.4

All respondents

Local councils and MPs as promoters of local interests, by selected attitudinal characteristics

		local council should be involved	it should be left to the MP	base
Party identification				
Conservative	%	59	33	(359)
Labour	%	66	28	(390)
Alliance	%	67	29	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship				
prefer party system	%	59	36	(393)
prefer non-party system	%	65	31	(593)
Satisfaction				
satisfied	%	62	32	(697)
quite satisfied	%	66	30	(168)
dissatisfied	%	51	36	(114)
Knowledge of local government				
well-informed	%	72	24	(209)
quite well-informed	%	67	29	(387)
not very well-informed	%	56	37	(407)
uninformed	%	42	36	(141)
Electoral participation				
habitual voter	%	61	32	(557)
occasional voter	%	62	33	(379)
non-voter	%	54	27	(141)
All respondents	%	61	32	(1,144)

TABLE 5.5

Major party supporters

Local councils and MPs as promoters of local interests, by political sympathy

		local council should be involved	it should be left to the MP	base
Conservative in Conservative locality	%	64	32	(143)
Conservative in non-Conservative locality	%	54	39	(217)
Labour in Labour locality	%	66	28	(195)
Labour in non-Labour locality	%	65	30	(198)
Politically sympathetic to local council	%	64	29	(338)
Politically unsympathetic to local council	%	59	34	(415)
All	%			(763)

ELECTED COUNCILS AND APPOINTED BOARDS

In order to ascertain the degree of commitment to the principle of elective local councils, we asked (Q.10) "How good or bad an idea would it be for people who run local government to be appointed by central government instead of being elected by local people?" We refer here to this as a choice between "elected councils" and "appointed boards", for that in essence is what the question proposes. Overall, our respondents registered very strong support for the maintenance of locally elected councils. Seventy-eight per cent thought appointed boards to be a "very" or "fairly" bad idea and only 14% a "very" or "fairly" good idea.

Table 5.6 shows the breakdown by age, sex, social class and activity status. There is very strong support for elected local government from all groups, but most particularly older people and those in higher social classes. Table 5.7 shows that the degree of support is little affected by the particular system in operation in the different parts of Great Britain. Nor do the other locational attributes bear very strongly upon the patterns of opinion.

TABLE 5.6

All respondents

Preferences for elected councils or appointed boards, by age, sex, social class and activity status

		central appointments would be:			
		"very" or "fairly" good idea	neither good nor bad	"fairly" or "very" bad idea	base
Age					
18-34	%	18	6	73	(360)
35-54	%	13	4	81	(400)
55-64	%	11	4	82	(164)
65 and over	%	7	4	81	(210)
Sex					
men	%	13	4	81	(537)
women	%	13	5	75	(603)
Social class					
AB	%	10	3	86	(217)
C1	%	13	4	82	(284)
C2	%	12	6	80	(306)
D	%	20	5	71	(155)
E	%	15	7	68	(176)
Activity status					
working	%	14	4	80	(651)
not working	%	11	5	77	(488)
All respondents	%	14	5	78	(1,144)

TABLE 5.7

All Respondents

Preferences for elected councils or appointed boards, by locational characteristics

		central appointments would be:			
		"very" or "fairly" good idea	neither good nor bad	"fairly" or "very" bad idea	base
Housing tenure					
owner occupier	%	13	4	80	(815)
council tenant	%	15	4	74	(234)
Length of residence					
up to 5 years	%	14	6	74	(254)
5 years or more	%	13	4	79	(890)
Region					
London	%	11	4	79	(123)
metropolitan England	%	15	4	77	(235)
rest of England and Wales	%	13	4	80	(677)
Scotland	%	11	10	72	(108)
Ratepaying					
pays rates in full	%	13	4	81	(812)
rates partly rebated	%	14	7	77	(118)
does not pay rates	%	14	7	74	(122)
All respondents	%	14	5	78	(1,144)

Table 5.8 shows that some small differences do emerge when they are divided according to the attitudes or respondents on other issues. Rather more of those who are dissatisfied with local government (that is, who think that neither their county nor their district runs things well) favour centrally appointed boards to run local services, but even here 70% would oppose such a move. There is also an appreciable relationship between knowledge of local government and support for its maintenance, although this too is amplified by the tendency of the less knowledgeable to have no opinion. This effect is also notable among the three different categories of electoral participation, where those who are more likely to vote appear to be more committed to local government than those who are less likely to do so.

TABLE 5.8

All respondents

Preferences for elected councils or appointed boards, by selected attitudinal characteristics					
		central appointments would be:			
		"very" or "fairly" good idea	neither good nor bad	"fairly" or "very" bad idea	base
Party identifications					
Conservative	%	16	6	78	(359)
Labour	%	13	3	80	(390)
Alliance	%	13	2	82	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship					
prefer party system	%	15	5	79	(393)
prefer non-party system	%	12	3	84	(593)
Satisfaction					
satisfied	%	12	5	81	(697)
quite satisfied	%	13	4	81	(168)
dissatisfied	%	19	5	70	(114)
Knowledge of local government					
well-informed	%	9	3	88	(209)
quite well-informed	%	12	5	82	(387)
not very well-informed	%	17	4	77	(407)
uninformed	%	17	10	57	(141)
Participation in elections					
habitual voter	%	11	3	83	(557)
occasional voter	%	15	5	77	(379)
non-voter	%	17	7	64	(114)
All respondents	%	14	5	78	(1,144)

Table 5.8 shows no difference between the supporters of the several parties on this issue. Table 5.9 shows, surprisingly, that respondents in areas where the party they support is in power are the least enthusiastic in their support for elected local government.

TABLE 5.9

Major party supporters

Preferences for elected councils or appointed boards, by political sympathy		central appointments would be:			base
		"very" or "fairly" good idea	neither good nor bad	"fairly" or "very" bad idea	
Conservative in Conservative locality	%	18	3	78	(143)
Conservative in non-Conservative locality	%	14	8	74	(217)
Labour in Labour locality	%	15	3	76	(195)
Labour in non-Labour locality	%	10	3	84	(198)
Politically sympathetic to local council	%	17	3	77	(338)
Politically unsympathetic to local council	%	12	3	79	(415)
All					(753)

THE DEGREE OF LOCAL AUTONOMY

We turn now to analyse two questions which were designed to elicit views of how much operating autonomy local councils have, relative to the central government. We asked (Q.11) "How much control do you think the local councils here have over the levels of local rates and local services?" We also asked (Q.7) "Local councils often say they are short of money. Do you think this is mainly because of council overspending, or mainly because councils don't get enough help from the government?"

Table 5.10 gives the frequency distribution of the answers to Q.11 (degree of local control) for the sample as a whole. A fairly finely divided scale of choice was presented, with a range of "shared control" options interposed between the bald alternatives of "almost completely controlled by local councils" and "almost completely controlled by government". Rather more people thought that rates and services were completely controlled by local government than completely controlled by central government.

Table 5.11 presents the first of the breakdowns by the standard attributes, and here we see something of a tendency for the higher social status groups in particular to emphasise the degree of local control. Nevertheless, some caution should be used in interpreting the responses to this question, for as Table 5.10 showed, a fairly substantial proportion (15%) of the whole sample had no view, and this proportion increased to as much as 18 and 26% respectively in social classes D and E.

TABLE 5.10

All respondents

Local and central control over the levels of rates and services	
	%
almost completely controlled by local councils	22
control shared, councils more say	17
control shared equally	16
control shared, government more say	18
almost completely controlled by government	12
don't know	15
Base	(1,144)

TABLE 5.11

All respondents

Local and central control over the levels of rates and services by age, sex, social class and activity status					
		largely controlled by council	both equally	largely controlled by government	base
Age					
18-34	%	37	15	33	(360)
35-54	%	42	18	30	(400)
55-64	%	42	18	27	(164)
65 and over	%	35	18	26	(210)
Sex					
men	%	41	17	35	(537)
women	%	38	16	26	(603)
Social class					
AB	%	42	19	28	(217)
C1	%	36	19	25	(284)
C2	%	40	15	32	(306)
D	%	33	15	33	(155)
E	%	27	13	34	(176)
Activity status					
working	%	40	19	30	(651)
not working	%	38	13	30	(488)
All respondents	%	39	16	30	(1,144)

Table 5.12 suggests that council tenants are less convinced of the reality of local autonomy, but this might be a function of the social characteristics of council tenants rather than tenure influences as such. The regional response is more interesting. It is notable that the Scottish respondents perceived a significantly greater degree of central control than those in England and Wales.

TABLE 5.12

All respondents

Local and central control over the levels of rates and services by locational characteristics

		largely controlled by council	both equally	largely controlled by government	base
Housing tenure					
owner occupier	%	41	17	29	(815)
council tenant	%	34	13	35	(234)
Length of residence					
up to 5 years	%	39	20	25	(254)
5 years or more	%	39	15	31	(890)
Region					
London	%	41	13	30	(123)
metropolitan England	%	39	20	26	(235)
rest of England and Wales	%	40	16	30	(677)
Scotland	%	28	17	39	(108)
Ratepaying					
pays rates in full	%	42	16	29	(812)
rates partly rebated	%	36	17	27	(118)
does not pay rates	%	34	17	29	(122)
All respondents	%	39	16	30	(1,144)

Table 5.13 provides one of the first signs of ideological polarisation within the survey, with Labour supporters being substantially more inclined to view the central government as a determining influence in the level of rates and services. The phrasing of the question—how much control “*the local councils here* have over the levels of rates and services”—might be thought more likely than many of our questions to elicit a place-specific response. But, as Table 5.14 shows, this was not notably the case, and local allegiances did little to accentuate the basic divisions between Labour and Conservative supporters. Overall, whether respondents lived in the areas of councils to which they were politically sympathetic or otherwise had no effect on their perception of local autonomy.

TABLE 5.13

All respondents

Local and central control over the levels of rates and services by selected attitudinal characteristics					
		largely controlled by council	both equally	largely controlled by government	base
Party identification					
Conservative	%	45	20	24	(359)
Labour	%	31	16	40	(390)
Alliance	%	48	20	25	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship					
prefer party system	%	40	16	33	(393)
prefer non-party system	%	40	18	31	(593)
Satisfaction					
satisfied	%	39	19	30	(697)
quite satisfied	%	43	13	38	(168)
dissatisfied	%	39	11	31	(114)
Knowledge of local government					
well-informed	%	34	14	38	(209)
quite well-informed	%	31	17	31	(387)
not very well-informed	%	41	15	29	(407)
uninformed	%	20	23	20	(141)
Participation in elections					
habitual voter	%	42	16	30	(557)
occasional voter	%	41	15	28	(379)
non-voter	%	29	15	29	(114)
All respondents	%	39	16	30	(1,144)

TABLE 5.14

Majority party supporters

Local and central control over the levels of rates and services by political sympathy

		largely controlled by council	both equally	largely controlled by government	base
Conservative in Conservative locality	%	46	21	20	(143)
Conservative in non-Conservative locality	%	42	18	26	(217)
Labour in Labour locality	%	31	16	35	(195)
Labour in non-Labour locality	%	30	16	43	(198)
Politically sympathetic to local council	%	37	20	38	(338)
Politically unsympathetic to local council	%	36	17	35	(415)
All					(753)

We now turn to the question of the allocation of responsibility for councils being "short of money". Table 5.15 shows a perhaps surprising relationship between age and beliefs about the responsibility for financial difficulties. The younger respondents had clear views—and indeed a majority among those under 35—that the central government was not giving enough "help". This view was shared by social classes D and E. It should be noted that the respondents found it easier to answer this question than the one about degrees of control.

Table 5.16 shows a particularly sharp polarisation between owner occupiers and council tenants on the attribution of blame for council overspending. In no other locational social group is there so little support for the notion of council overspending or so great a readiness to blame the government as among council tenants. Also notable is the high proportion of Londoners who judge the fault to lie with their local authorities.

Table 5.17 clearly shows that party attitudes on this issue are very strongly polarised. Almost half the Conservatives subscribe to the view that those councils (we know not which) that are "short of money" have only themselves to blame, while the same proportion of Labour supporters subscribe to the opposite view. Table 5.18 shows that what we are tapping here is a political attitude to local government affairs in general, and not a localised response to a particular council. The responses of neither Labour nor Conservative supporters to this question are greatly affected by where they happen—politically speaking—to live.

TABLE 5.15

All respondents

Reasons for local councils being short of money, by age, sex, social class and activity status

		council overspending	both equally	not enough help from government	base
Age					
18-34	%	23	17	52	(360)
35-54	%	31	18	44	(400)
55-64	%	39	15	33	(164)
65 and over	%	33	14	41	(210)
Sex					
men	%	33	16	41	(537)
women	%	32	17	44	(603)
Social class					
AB	%	33	20	38	(217)
C1	%	33	22	36	(284)
C2	%	31	14	48	(306)
D	%	23	14	56	(155)
E	%	28	19	50	(176)
Activity status					
working	%	30	18	44	(651)
not working	%	30	14	45	(488)
All respondents	%	30	16	44	(1,144)

TABLE 5.16

All respondents

Reasons for local councils being short of money, by locational characteristics

		council overspending	both equally	not enough help from government	base
Housing tenure					
owner occupier	%	33	19	39	(815)
council tenant	%	20	8	63	(234)
Length of residence					
up to 5 years	%	26	18	45	(254)
5 years or more	%	31	16	44	(890)
Region					
London	%	40	14	37	(123)
metropolitan England	%	32	20	43	(235)
rest of England and Wales	%	29	16	46	(677)
Scotland	%	24	16	46	(108)
Ratepaying					
pays rates in full	%	32	17	43	(812)
rates partly rebated	%	25	17	47	(118)
does not pay rates	%	33	16	45	(122)
All respondents	%	30	16	44	(1,144)

TABLE 5.17

All respondents

Reasons for local councils being short of money, by selected attitudinal characteristics

		council overspending	both equally	not enough help from government	base
Party identification					
Conservative	%	47	20	24	(359)
Labour	%	18	12	64	(390)
Alliance	%	28	19	49	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship					
prefer party system	%	28	12	53	(393)
prefer non-party system	%	34	19	40	(593)
Satisfaction					
satisfied	%	27	17	48	(697)
quite satisfied	%	38	15	42	(168)
dissatisfied	%	46	16	30	(114)
Knowledge of local government					
well-informed	%	30	21	41	(209)
quite well-informed	%	31	17	45	(387)
not very well-informed	%	30	15	47	(407)
uninformed	%	29	11	41	(141)
Participation in elections					
habitual voter	%	33	17	41	(557)
occasional voter	%	26	16	49	(379)
non-voter	%	33	11	44	(114)
All respondents	%	30	16	44	(1,144)

TABLE 5.18

Major party supporters

Reasons for local councils being short of money, by political sympathy				
	council overspending %	both equally %	not enough help from government %	base
Conservative in Conservative locality	44	21	21	(143)
Conservative in non-Conservative locality	46	19	25	(217)
Labour in Labour locality	19	14	60	(195)
Labour in non-Labour locality	18	9	67	(198)
Politically sympathetic to local council	29	16	42	(348)
Politically unsympathetic to local council	33	14	45	(415)
All				(753)

ATTITUDES TO CENTRAL CONTROL

We asked our respondents "Do you think local councils ought to be controlled by central government more, less, or about the same as now?" Those who replied in favour of "more" control were asked if they had in mind "a little" or "a lot" more, and those who replied "less" were similarly asked to indicate the degree of control they favoured. In practice, it is rarely fruitful to analyse the differences between social groups in terms of these fine divisions, as differing propensities to plump for moderate or extreme options may distort the analysis. But it is worth stating the overall distribution on this scale. Forty-six per cent of the respondents wished central control to be kept "about the same" as now; 5% favoured a lot more control, and 9% a lot less control over local councils. This shows reasonable satisfaction with the *status quo*.

Table 5.19, like those which follow, conflates "a little" and "a lot" on both sides of the scale in order to present the summary figures. This shows that there is stronger support for a reduction in central control than for an increase. It is apparent that the patterning according to personal attributes is very stable, with all social groups having around half the respondents in favour of maintaining the *status quo*, and around a third in favour of less control, and around 15% in favour of more control.

TABLE 5.19

All respondents

Preferred degree of central control over local councils, by age, sex, social class and activity status					
		more	about the same	less	base
Age					
18-34	%	14	44	35	(360)
35-54	%	16	45	35	(400)
55-64	%	12	53	32	(164)
65 and over	%	11	48	30	(210)
Sex					
men	%	15	41	41	(537)
women	%	14	51	25	(603)
Social class					
AB	%	17	49	31	(217)
C1	%	16	46	33	(284)
C2	%	13	44	37	(306)
D	%	14	51	32	(155)
E	%	14	44	31	(176)
Activity status					
working	%	15	45	36	(651)
not working	%	15	49	29	(488)
All respondents	%	14	46	33	(1,144)

Table 5.20 shows that while there may be some strong locational influences on beliefs about the extent of central control, support for more or less of it is less strongly affected by location. There is a slight tendency for people living in London and the metropolitan areas to favour more central control than those living elsewhere, but the difference is not great.

The apparent stability of opinion within the sample breaks down as soon as we relate attitudes to central control to broader political opinion (Table 5.21). Alliance supporters mirror the pattern for the sample as a whole. Conservatives stand generally for the present regime of controls and few of them favour a lessening of control. However, almost half of the Labour supporters favour a reduction in central control and only about one in ten of them an increase. There is, once again, a tendency for those who are dissatisfied with the performance of their local councils to be more strongly in favour of a reduction in their autonomy. Table 5.22 confirms that these partisan attitudes represent generalised views about local government, and are not greatly influenced by the political control of the council for the area where the respondent lives.

TABLE 5.20

All respondents

Preferred degree of central control over local councils, by locational characteristics					
		more	about the same	less	base
Housing tenure					
owner occupier	%	15	49	30	(815)
council tenant	%	11	42	39	(234)
Length of residence					
up to 5 years	%	13	47	31	(254)
5 years or more	%	14	46	34	(234)
Region					
London	%	18	36	34	(123)
metropolitan England	%	18	45	32	(235)
rest of England and Wales	%	13	50	32	(677)
Scotland	%	13	40	39	(108)
Ratepaying					
pays rates in full	%	14	48	33	(812)
rates partly rebated	%	15	46	32	(118)
does not pay rates	%	14	42	34	(122)
All respondents	%	14	46	33	(1,144)

TABLE 5.21

All respondents

Preferred degree of central control over local councils, by selected attitudinal characteristics

		more	about the same	less	base
Party identification					
Conservative	%	23	59	15	(359)
Labour	%	9	38	47	(390)
Alliance	%	14	48	34	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship					
prefer party system	%	12	50	34	(393)
prefer non-party system	%	16	43	36	(593)
Satisfaction					
satisfied	%	12	51	34	(697)
quite satisfied	%	16	45	38	(168)
dissatisfied	%	27	32	28	(114)
Knowledge of local government					
well-informed	%	12	42	45	(209)
quite well-informed	%	14	45	36	(387)
not very well-informed	%	16	50	28	(407)
uninformed	%	12	45	21	(141)
Participation in elections					
habitual voter	%	13	46	35	(557)
occasional voter	%	16	45	33	(379)
non-voter	%	12	46	26	(114)
All respondents	%	14	46	33	(1,144)

TABLE 5.22

Majority party supporters

Preferred degree of central control over local councils, by political sympathy

		more	about the same	less	base
Conservative in Conservative locality	%	22	67	9	(143)
Conservative in non-Conservative locality	%	24	52	18	(217)
Labour in Labour locality	%	10	38	45	(195)
Labour in non-Labour locality	%	8	39	49	(198)
Politically sympathetic to local council	%	15	50	30	(338)
Politically unsympathetic to local council	%	16	46	32	(415)
All					(753)

CHAPTER 6

ELECTIONS AND PARTY POLITICS

One of the principal objectives of this survey was to throw light upon the patterns of local voting behaviour, and to determine how far the propensity to vote and electoral choice are shaped by local, and how far by national, factors. These questions are taken up by Professor Miller in the second part of this volume. In pursuing these issues we also generated a considerable body of data on our respondents' attitudes to local elections, to party politics and to the electoral system, as well as gaining some measure of their degree of confidence in the local democratic processes. This chapter deals with these issues.

We begin by looking at attitudes to the electoral system itself. We then move on to examine the ways in which party politics in local government are regarded by electors. We conclude with a discussion of attitudes to the operation of local democracy.

PARTY POLITICS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

We asked our respondents "Do you think that in the last ten years or so, local councils have become more or less dominated by party politics, or has it not changed?" (Q.33). Practically no one considered that party politics had diminished, either among the sample as a whole (3%), or in any of the sub-groups, so we have discarded these responses from the detailed analysis. On the other hand, a fairly substantial minority of respondents—12% overall—had no view. Tables 6.1 to 6.4 accordingly show the distribution of opinion on this issue, discounting in this case those who thought party politics to have diminished, but including the "don't knows".

Table 6.1 shows that overall a little under two-thirds of our respondents thought party politics in local government to have increased over the past decade, and a little under a quarter of them thought there had been no real change. As can be seen, the pattern of opinion between particular social groups is affected by the extent to which people are unable to come to a view, but is otherwise stable. Table 6.2 shows a similar pattern of stability of opinion according to location.

Table 6.3, in sharp contrast, shows some strong associations with attitudinal characteristics. Some party differences can be distinguished here. More striking, and perhaps wholly expectable, is the contrast of view on the prevalence of party politics in local government between those who welcome it and those who do not, with a fifteen point difference dividing them. Those who are particularly knowledgeable about local government see it as having become more partisan in the last ten years, while the less knowledgeable are less aware of the impact of party. Also expectable is the tendency for those who vote habitually to have a clearer view of the current extent of party politics than those who do not vote. Table 6.4 suggests that such views as do exist are little shaped by local circumstances, for no very great differences divide those who live in areas controlled by their favoured party from those who do not.

TABLE 6.1

All respondents

The increasing domination of party politics, by age, sex, social class and activity status

		more dominated	not changed	don't know	base
Age					
18-34	%	61	15	21	(360)
35-54	%	65	25	8	(400)
55-64	%	60	30	4	(164)
65 and over	%	58	32	10	(210)
Sex					
men	%	67	23	6	(537)
women	%	57	24	17	(603)
Social class					
AB	%	69	22	6	(217)
C1	%	71	20	8	(284)
C2	%	56	26	15	(306)
D	%	56	24	19	(155)
E	%	54	28	13	(176)
Activity status					
working	%	63	22	12	(651)
not working	%	60	26	12	(488)
All respondents	%	62	23	12	(1,144)

TABLE 6.2

All respondents

The increasing domination of party politics, by locational characteristics

		more dominated	not changed	don't know	base
Housing tenure					
owner occupier	%	63	24	10	(815)
council tenant	%	55	24	18	(234)
Length of residence					
up to 5 years	%	62	18	18	(254)
5 years or more	%	62	25	10	(890)
Region					
London	%	59	22	17	(123)
metropolitan England	%	63	21	13	(235)
rest of England and Wales	%	63	20	10	(677)
Scotland	%	56	26	15	(108)
Ratepaying					
pays rates in full	%	63	25	10	(812)
rates partly rebated	%	64	22	10	(118)
does not pay rates	%	61	17	16	(122)
All respondents	%	62	23	12	(1,144)

TABLE 6.3

All respondents

The increasing domination of party politics, by selected attitudinal characteristics

		more dominated	not changed	don't know	base
Party identification					
Conservative	%	67	26	7	(359)
Labour	%	56	25	15	(390)
Alliance	%	71	21	7	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship					
prefer party system	%	56	32	9	(393)
prefer non-party system	%	71	18	8	(593)
Satisfaction					
satisfied	%	61	26	10	(697)
quite satisfied	%	69	23	5	(168)
dissatisfied	%	70	17	11	(114)
Knowledge of local government					
well-informed	%	79	18	2	(209)
quite well-informed	%	66	22	8	(387)
not very well-informed	%	58	24	15	(407)
uninformed	%	36	32	30	(141)
Participation in elections					
habitual voter	%	66	25	7	(557)
occasional voter	%	63	21	13	(379)
non-voter	%	47	25	27	(114)
All respondents	%	62	23	12	(1,144)

TABLE 6.4

Major party supporters

The increasing domination of party politics, by political sympathy					
		more dominated	not changed	don't know	base
Conservative in Conservative locality	%	66	28	4	(143)
Conservative in non-Conservative locality	%	64	23	9	(217)
Labour in Labour locality	%	54	25	18	(195)
Labour in non- Labour locality	%	60	24	12	(198)
Politically sympathetic to local council	%	59	26	12	(338)
Politically unsympathetic to local council	%	62	24	10	(415)
All					(753)

Immediately before asking for their views on the trend towards partisanship, we mentioned that "In most areas councillors come from one of the political parties and councils are organised on party lines. There are some areas where most councillors are independent and the council is not organised on party lines" and we asked "which do you personally think is the better system?" (Q.32). This question will already be familiar, for we have used the responses to it as an analysis variable throughout this report. At this point it is in turn analysed in terms of the other analysis variables. Despite the slight lead implicit in the question ("most areas . . . are organised on party lines") there was a clear expression of preference for the non-party system throughout the sample, with around half favouring it, as against just a third for the party system. As Table 6.5 shows, there are no very great differences of opinion on this issue, although social groups A and B tend to have a particularly strong preference for the non-party system.

Table 6.6 shows a division on housing tenure lines, with council tenants registering unusually high levels of preference for party politics in local government. Table 6.7 shows an analogous division between the supporters of the several political parties, with a little less than half of the Labour supporters favouring the party system, and a substantial majority against it among the Alliance supporters.

TABLE 6.5

All respondents

Attitudes to party control of local councils by age, sex, social class and activity status			
	party system better %	non-party system better %	base
Age			
18-34	36	50	(360)
35-54	33	55	(400)
55-64	36	51	(164)
65 and over	34	49	(210)
Sex			
men	36	56	(537)
women	33	48	(603)
Social class			
AB	25	66	(217)
C1	35	53	(284)
C2	35	52	(306)
D	43	46	(155)
E	36	38	(176)
Activity status			
working	34	55	(651)
not working	35	47	(488)
All respondents	34	52	(1,144)

TABLE 6.6

All respondents

Attitudes to party control of local councils by locational characteristics

	party system better %	non-party system better %	base
Housing tenure			
owner occupier	30	58	(815)
council tenant	44	36	(234)
Length of residence			
up to 5 years	36	50	(254)
5 years or more	34	52	(890)
Region			
London	36	49	(123)
metropolitan England	31	55	(235)
rest of England and Wales	35	52	(677)
Scotland	37	46	(108)
Ratepaying			
pays rates in full	32	54	(812)
rates partly rebated	41	50	(118)
does not pay rates	43	41	(122)
All respondents	34	52	(1,144)

TABLE 6.7

All respondents

Attitudes to party control of local councils by selected attitudinal characteristics			
	party system better %	non-party system better %	base
Party identification			
Conservative	33	59	(359)
Labour	47	38	(390)
Alliance	22	70	(196)
Satisfaction			
satisfied	37	50	(697)
quite satisfied	32	60	(168)
dissatisfied	25	59	(114)
Knowledge of local government			
well-informed	32	60	(209)
quite well-informed	33	59	(387)
not very well-informed	38	47	(407)
uninformed	33	34	(141)
Participation in elections			
habitual voter	33	57	(557)
occasional voter	35	49	(379)
non-voter	37	36	(114)
All respondents	34	52	(1,144)

Table 6.8 shows one of the rare relationships between "political sympathy" and views on an issue. Those who support a major party are more likely to approve of the politicisation of local government if they live in an area under the control of the party they support. This might lead us to discount their views on the substance of the issue, but it should be remembered that the relationship, although discernible, is not very strong, and is more a notable exception to an otherwise general rule that opinion is rarely coloured by local political circumstances.

To sum up this section, there is strong support for the proposition that party politics is a growing phenomenon in local government. Almost nowhere is it thought to be decreasing. Yet this development is by no means welcomed, for the majority of respondents would prefer local councils to be run on non-partisan lines. The sharpest line of division on this issue is party itself, with Labour supporters—particularly those who live in Labour-controlled areas—being relatively well disposed towards party politics.

TABLE 6.8

Major party supporters

Attitudes to party control of local councils by political sympathy			
	party system better %	non-party system better %	base
Conservative in Conservative locality	40	49	(143)
Conservative in non-Conservative locality	27	63	(217)
Labour in Labour locality	51	31	(195)
Labour in non-Labour locality	43	45	(198)
Politically sympathetic to local council	46	39	(338)
Politically unsympathetic to local council	35	54	(415)
All			(753)

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND ELECTIONS

In order to discover whether our respondents had any views on the merits of "whole council" elections every four years and the annual election of one-third of the councillors we first described the two systems (Q.31) and then asked "which do you think is the better idea?" We also asked, following a sequence of questions voting in local elections, "In some countries voting in local elections is compulsory. Do you think it would be a good idea or a bad idea for voting in local elections to be made compulsory in Britain?" (Q.44a).

Table 6.9 shows that generally more than a third but less than half of the respondents favour compulsory voting, with some tendency for the older voter to be more favourably disposed towards compulsion. Opinion is also equally split between four-year and annual elections. Table 6.10 presents the findings in terms of the locational characteristics of the respondents, and again, the stability of opinion throughout the sample is notable. It does not, therefore, appear to be affected by the system of elections applying in the area.

Turning to the attitudinal characteristics shown in Table 6.11 it is interesting to see that almost half of the habitual voters favour compulsion, but only one-fifth of those who neither voted in the last local election nor expected to do so in the next. Nor, as Table 6.12 shows, is there any particularly remarkable relationship with political sympathy.

TABLE 6.9

All respondents

Attitudes to compulsory voting, and preferred frequency of local elections, by age, sex, social class and activity status

	compulsory voting 'a good idea' %	whole council every 4 years %	part of the council each year %	base
Age				
18-34	34	46	50	(360)
35-54	39	51	42	(400)
55-64	42	49	42	(164)
65 and over	45	42	42	(210)
Sex				
men	38	52	43	(537)
women	39	44	45	(603)
Social class				
AB	37	45	46	(217)
C1	40	48	47	(284)
C2	38	51	43	(306)
D	41	52	43	(155)
E	40	40	40	(176)
Activity status				
working	36	50	45	(651)
not working	42	44	44	(488)
All respondents	39	47	44	(1,144)

TABLE 6.10

All respondents

Attitudes to compulsory voting, and preferred frequency of local elections, by locational characteristics

	compulsory voting 'a good idea' %	whole council every 4 years %	part of the council each year %	base
Housing tenure				
owner occupier	37	48	44	(815)
council tenant	44	46	44	(234)
Length of residence				
up to 5 years	33	48	44	(254)
5 years or more	40	47	44	(890)
Region				
London	39	51	36	(123)
metropolitan				
England	46	44	47	(235)
rest of England and				
Wales	36	48	45	(677)
Scotland	43	45	45	(108)
Ratepaying				
pays rates in full	38	49	45	(812)
rates partly rebated	52	43	44	(118)
does not pay rates	36	47	43	(122)
All respondents	39	47	44	(1,144)

TABLE 6.11

All respondents

Attitudes to compulsory voting, and preferred frequency of local elections, by selected attitudinal characteristics

	compulsory voting 'a good idea' %	whole council every 4 years %	part of the council each year %	base
Party identification				
Conservative	39	49	48	(359)
Labour	43	43	45	(390)
Alliance	40	47	47	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship				
prefer party system	40	53	44	(393)
prefer non-party system	40	47	48	(593)
Satisfaction				
satisfied	38	49	44	(697)
quite satisfied	43	50	45	(168)
dissatisfied	46	42	44	(114)
Knowledge of local government				
well-informed	40	46	51	(209)
quite well-informed	41	53	41	(387)
not very well- informed	34	47	45	(407)
uninformed	46	36	42	(141)
Participation in elections				
habitual voter	47	50	44	(557)
occasional voter	35	47	45	(379)
non-voter	21	41	41	(114)
All respondents	39	47	44	(1,144)

TABLE 6.12

Major party supporters

Attitudes to compulsory voting, and preferred frequency of local elections, by political sympathy

	compulsory voting 'a good idea' %	whole council every 4 years %	part of the council each year %	base
Conservative in Conservative locality	37	54	43	(143)
Conservative in non-Conservative locality	38	44	48	(217)
Labour in Labour locality	48	45	49	(195)
Labour in non- Labour locality	38	52	40	(198)
Politically sympathetic to local council	43	49	47	(338)
Politically unsympathetic to local council	38	47	44	(415)
All				(753)

ATTITUDES TO LOCAL DEMOCRACY

In the survey conducted for the Maud Committee in 1965, a number of questions were included in order to assess public attitudes to voting in local elections. These took the form of five statements about the operation of local democracy (four of them negative, one positive) with which the respondents were invited to agree or disagree. The overall distribution of responses was then displayed, and a simple index of "scores" constructed. We decided to re-run these same questions to see if any general shifts in attitudes to the validity of the local democratic processes had occurred over a timespan of twenty years. The four statements shown in Table 6.13 were used. The fifth—"the people who get in at local elections can have a big effect on the way people like me live"—was subject to a typographical error in the printing of the questionnaire, substituting "vote" for "live". The error went undiscovered until the analysis stage and while the question certainly elicited responses in the form asked it has been excluded from further consideration. The loss of the fifth attitude question rules out the possibility of constructing a similar index to that used in the Maud Committee work. On the other hand, the index used for the Maud survey blurs some interesting issues. We therefore

decided not to construct our own four-item scale, but to subject each of the statements in turn to the customary form of analysis.

An item by item comparison with Maud results is however possible, and this is shown in Table 6.13. We did make one important change, which was to permit a wider range of response to each question than the bald agree/disagree offered by Maud. Our respondents were able to record the strength of their agreement (or disagreement) and to opt for neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Given this refinement, it is perhaps surprising that the differences in response between 1965 and 1985 are (in terms of confidence in local democracy) all in a negative direction, the percentages shown in the table being those of our respondents who agreed, or agreed strongly with the proposition.

TABLE 6.13

All respondents

Attitudes to local democracy, 1965 and 1985		
	1965 agree %	1985 agree %
'So many other people vote in local elections that it is not important whether I vote or not'	10	16
'The people you vote for say they'll do things for you but once they're in they forget what they've said'	56	66
'The way people vote at council elections is the main thing that decides how things are run in this locality'	77	60
'Local council elections are sometimes so complicated that I really don't know who to vote for'	29	34
Base	(2,184)	(1,144)

Tables 6.14 to 6.17 show the breakdowns by each of our familiar categories for each of the four statements. In each case the "positive" response is shown, that is, the proportion of respondents agreeing with a favourable statement about local democracy, or disagreeing with an unfavourable one. It would appear that these four questions worked fairly well, for they did elicit very different responses from different groups of respondents. They also show an encouraging consistency across items when the responses are sub-divided according to the personal, locational or attitudinal characteristics of the respondents.

Table 6.14 shows the responses according to age, sex, class and activity status. The younger voters display a weaker orientation to local democracy than the over 55s in particular and there is a clear class relationship with three of the four items. But also notable is the very weak response in all these groups to the proposition that "the people you vote for say they'll do things for you but once they're

in they forget what they've said''. Only 15% of the sample disagreed with this statement and only a quarter of the AB's, the group with generally the highest degree of confidence in local democracy. As this strong skew towards agreement in the responses to this question is to be found throughout the locational sub-groups shown in Table 6.15 it is likely that it was seen as a relatively inconsequential matter, a more or less cheerful dismissal of the hustings promises that in no way betokens the "alienation" for which the Maud study was searching.

TABLE 6.14

All respondents

Attitudes to local democracy, by age, sex, social class and activity status					
	disagree 'not important to vote' %	disagree 'they forget what they've said' %	agree 'voting decides things' %	disagree 'elections so complicated' %	base
Age					
18-34	64	12	52	44	(360)
35-54	82	18	59	60	(400)
55-64	83	20	72	60	(164)
65 and over	72	12	69	58	(210)
Sex					
men	77	16	60	61	(537)
women	73	13	61	49	(603)
Social class					
AB	88	26	60	69	(217)
C1	79	15	63	58	(284)
C2	73	12	63	51	(306)
D	63	11	53	43	(155)
E	63	9	60	46	(176)
Activity status					
working	75	17	58	54	(651)
not working	73	13	64	55	(488)
All respondents	74	15	60	54	(1,144)

It is in relation to the other attitudinal variables that questions of this sort come into their own. Table 6.16 shows for example some quite strong relationships with knowledge of local government, while the views of voters and non-voters on whether it is 'important to vote' are consistent with what might be expected from their reported behaviour. Partisan differences are small in relation to the sharp divisions of opinion to be found elsewhere in the tables, and Table 6.17 indicates that there is no partisan undercurrent shaping the responses to these simple but effective tests of attitudes to, and trust in, the operation of local democracy.

TABLE 6.15

All respondents

Attitudes to local democracy, by locational characteristics					
	disagree 'not important to vote' %	disagree 'they forget what they've said' %	agree 'voting decides things' %	disagree 'elections so complicated' %	base
Housing tenure					
owner occupier	77	15	60	55	(815)
council tenant	69	10	62	50	(234)
Length of residence					
up to 5 years	74	11	53	52	(254)
5 years or more	75	16	63	55	(890)
Region					
London	79	19	51	55	(123)
metropolitan					
England	73	10	66	60	(235)
rest of England and					
Wales	75	16	60	52	(677)
Scotland	72	15	63	58	(108)
Ratepaying					
pays rates in full	77	17	61	56	(812)
rates partly rebated	81	14	65	57	(118)
does not pay rates	64	10	60	48	(122)
All respondents	74	15	60	54	(1,144)

TABLE 6.16

All respondents

Attitudes to local democracy, by selected attitudinal characteristics

	disagree 'not important to vote' %	disagree 'they forget what they've said' %	agree 'voting decides things' %	disagree 'elections so complicated' %	base
Party identification					
Conservative	83	18	66	66	(359)
Labour	73	14	61	52	(390)
Alliance	82	11	65	56	(196)
Attitudes to partisanship					
prefer party system	73	16	65	55	(393)
prefer non-party system	80	15	60	59	(593)
Satisfaction					
satisfied	75	16	62	54	(697)
quite satisfied	84	12	61	61	(168)
dissatisfied	73	11	66	58	(114)
Knowledge of local government					
well-informed	92	20	63	69	(209)
quite well-informed	79	21	66	66	(387)
not very well- informed	69	13	60	47	(407)
uninformed	48	9	49	24	(141)
Participation in elections					
habitual voter	90	19	67	70	(557)
occasional voter	65	12	59	43	(379)
non-voter	34	3	40	24	(114)
All respondents	74	15	60	54	(1,144)

TABLE 6.17

Major party supporters

Attitudes to local democracy, by political sympathy

	disagree 'not important to vote' %	disagree 'they forget what they've said' %	agree 'voting decides things' %	disagree 'elections so complicated' %	base
Conservative in Conservative locality	81	19	67	64	(143)
Conservative in non-Conservative locality	81	17	63	63	(217)
Labour in Labour locality	73	15	67	54	(195)
Labour in non- Labour locality	74	16	66	51	(198)
Politically sympathetic to local council	76	15	67	58	(338)
Politically unsympathetic to local council	78	16	60	57	(415)
All					(753)

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

This report has reviewed the principal findings of the NOP survey, the first major national investigation of public attitudes to local government to be undertaken since that carried out for the Maud Committee in 1965. On this occasion many new questions were asked, and the scope for comparisons over time is inevitably limited. Where there are common themes, as in the contact which the ordinary person has with his or her councillor, or the extent to which the local government elector can grasp the range of functions and responsibilities conferred upon local government, the form of the question and the basis of measurement is often different. The primary purpose of this survey was not however to assess change over time, but to furnish the Committee with an adequate factual basis for which to judge the relationships between local authorities and the public as we found them at the end of 1985.

One of our first concerns was to establish that the responses to the survey questions represented genuine attitudes to local government, rather than to the more immediate circumstances of residence in a particular area. The political sympathy variable, with its comparison of the attitudes of major party supporters living within the area of a council which they favoured politically, or otherwise, provides a useful test of this point. As we have seen, the occasions on which any noteworthy differences emerge between those who are politically sympathetic to their local council and those who are not are few indeed. Where such differences do emerge, they are often linked to issues on which the partisan divisions overshadow all others. Such questions arise mainly in connection with the relations between central and local government, where the divisions are very sharply drawn. Elsewhere, there is abundant evidence that the survey did indeed evoke genuine responses to the questions which the interviewers put.

The principal findings may be summarised as follows:

(i) there is a fairly high level of knowledge of local government with more than half of the sample being able to provide correct answers to at least 10 of the 16 factual questions. Men proved generally more knowledgeable than women, owner occupiers than council tenants, and people in the higher status groups proved more knowledgeable than those in the lower. There is a high level of awareness of local government services and of their location although almost half of the respondents thought the hospital service to be a county function. Just under a third can name a local councillor, but most can name their party, and that in control of the district and county councils. Council tenants were much better informed about their political representatives than were owner occupiers while Londoners were particularly poorly informed.

(ii) Overall, one-fifth of the sample (and one-third of council tenants) had had some contact with their local councillor while about half had been in contact with the council offices. Generally, people felt more satisfied with the outcome of that contact where it had been with a councillor. Levels of satisfaction with local government remain high, with more than 70% of the

sample being satisfied with the performance of both county and local authorities. The least satisfied respondents were those living in London and the metropolitan areas.

(iii) As many as 42% of the respondents had wanted to complain to their local council and a quarter had done so. Most of the actual complaints concerned housing, planning and environmental matters generally. Faced with the prospect of a "really wrong" decision being taken by their local authority almost all (93%) claim they would do something to help persuade the council to change their mind. The most favoured course of action was to approach the elected representatives direct, both at local and at Parliamentary levels.

(iv) The respondents expressed considerable support for elected local government. There were few who thought that local authorities should not do some of the things that they presently do. This general support extended to a strong preference for the maintenance of elected local councils as opposed to centrally appointed boards. A majority (61/32) favoured the local authority playing a role in representing the interests of the locality to government. On the other questions on the role of local government, party divisions were paramount. Labour party supporters have a very much more hostile view of central control than the rest of the sample.

(v) There were divided views on the local electoral system, with some favouring election of the whole council every four years and about as many favouring annual elections for a third of the council. People were largely agreed that party politics were far more prevalent in local government than ten years ago, and the majority did not favour it. The respondents appeared to be rather more cynical in their attitudes to the workings of the local electoral system than those interviewed 20 years ago for the Maud Committee.

2. LOCAL ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This report is based upon an extensive review of the literature on local elections, supplemented by an analysis of the December 1985 NOP survey commissioned by the Committee. The computer analysis was carried out at the University of Glasgow.

The principal question about local elections which is addressed here is whether they reflect *local* or *national* politics; and if they reflect both to some degree, then *to what extent* do they reflect local and national influences? These are important questions for they go to the heart of the issue of representativeness and responsibility in British government. Chapter 2 sets out the context in which local electoral behaviour should be understood.

Chapter 3 examines the factors that influence *turnout* in local elections, and Chapter 4 the factors that influence *voting choices* in local elections. Chapter 5 draws some conclusions on the basis of the analysis.

THE APPROACH AND THE FINDINGS

Turnout

The report places British local electoral behaviour in the context of political behaviour generally. Political participation can best be understood in terms of a *two-step model*:

- step 1: Personal characteristics (for example class, education, age) influence psychological involvement with politics (for example interest, discussion, knowledge).
- step 2: Psychological involvement combines with institutional mobilisation factors to influence actual turnout. In some parts of the world these institutional mobilisation (or constraint) factors are primarily legal and administrative (for example registration restrictions, threats to jobs etc). In Britain mobilisation is more important than constraint; and mobilisation factors are primarily political (stimulating issues, party loyalty or identification, etc).

Before we can apply this model to local elections we have to take account of both local and national factors. So the two-step model becomes a *two-level* (local and national), two-step model. A diagram of this model appears on p. 123.

Analysis of the NOP survey shows the importance of national factors for local turnout: (i) *National mobilising factors* (issue concern, strength of party identification) influenced propensity to vote in national elections which in turn strongly influenced propensity to vote in local elections; (ii) *Psychological involvement* in local politics (knowledge, interest, discussion) influenced local turnout but was itself largely a reflection of psychological involvement with national politics; (iii) *Local mobilising factors* (satisfaction with local government, attitudes to local autonomy, the importance

assigned to local issues, attention to the local news media, even rate-paying) had little influence on local turnout.

Any simple, unqualified statement risks misleading the reader. But, with that caveat, the survey suggests that different people have different propensities to vote; that specifically local factors have only a minor role in affecting local turnout; and that the broad outlines of turnout patterns in local elections simply reflect general propensities to vote in what is seen by many as an unimportant and unstimulating election.

Voting choice

In Chapter 4 the report reviews the argument that local voting choice merely reflects national political preference, and the more recent counter argument that local politics affects local election choice. The survey analysis quantifies the extent of local influence. Once again national factors, especially party identification and (national) voting choice, dominate local electoral behaviour. Very few respondents declared a willingness to vote in a local election for the major party they opposed nationally.

Less than 1% of respondents indicated a Labour or Conservative preference nationally coupled with the opposite preference locally. That would appear to offer no scope at all for local political effects—but such a conclusion would be wrong. There is scope for local political effects, but it is limited both in quantity and in kind.

About four fifths of local election voters appear to vote according to their national party preferences. The remaining one fifth do not—either because they do not possess a national preference, or because they desert their national preference in order to vote for the Alliance or for “other” candidates in local elections. The extent of these local deviations is greater amongst those who claim to vote “on local issues”, or “for the local candidate rather than the party”, though the extent remains limited: 71% of those who claim to vote on local issues and 64% of those who claim to vote for the local candidate do in fact vote in local elections for the party they prefer nationally.

Local effects seem to move about one tenth of local voters away from their national preference and towards “less political” candidates (Alliance and “others”, mainly independents). And local influences may determine the local choice of another tenth of local voters who have no national preference.

TWO CAVEATS

Whether these results show a surprising degree of local influence, or a surprising lack of it, depends upon prior expectations. But two qualifications should be borne in mind. First, these are national average figures. It is possible that local effects are much greater in a *few* localities. (Arithmetically they cannot be *much* greater in *many*; and they can only be *greater* in some, if they are *less* in others). Second, a survey only a week or two before Christmas may produce less evidence of local political factors than the same survey repeated a week or two before a local election.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONTEXT: REPRESENTATIVE AND RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT

At its best, the British political system is expected to provide government which is "representative and responsible"—the title of Birch's classic text on the British constitution.¹ The phrase denotes government that is representative of the governed and responsible to them. It implies a connection between the inputs and outputs of government, between electoral choice and public policy which is likely to influence both the quantity and the quality of electoral behaviour.

Although some writers on British central government have asked "Do parties make a difference?"² the general assumption has been that central government has a large measure of effective autonomy and that British governments can be held responsible by their electorates for the events and conditions of the time. Butler and Stokes refer to the "popular acceptance" of the "idea that the (central) government is accountable for good and bad times".³ The nature of that accountability may be quite complex both in terms of realities and perceptions, but the general notion that the real or supposed policy outputs of British central government will have an impact on its popularity and eventual electoral success underlies many studies of central government policy. In particular, since Goodhart and Bhansali published their analysis of the impact of unemployment and inflation on central government's Gallup Poll ratings there has been a steady flow of books and articles statistically correlating opinion poll ratings or election results with economic conditions.⁴

In sharp contrast, most analysts of British local government have highlighted its *lack of autonomy*, and its *insulation from its electorate*.⁵ Caught between the requirements imposed from above by central government and the social needs and resources of the local area, there has been real doubt as to whether local government has any effective political autonomy at all.

Moreover, while the general public is reputed to over-estimate central government's freedom of action, it is reputed to under-estimate or even disregard altogether local government's freedom of action. Central government's own actions

¹ A H Birch, *Representative and Responsible Government* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964).

² R Rose, *Do Parties Make a Difference?* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

³ D Butler and D Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

⁴ C A E Goodhart and R J Bhansali, "Political economy", *Political Studies* 18 (1970) 43–106. Later examples include W L Miller and M Mackie, "The electoral cycle and the asymmetry of government and opposition popularity", *Political Studies* 21 (1973) 263–79; D Butler and D Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1974); J Alt, *The Politics of Economic Decline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); P Whiteley (ed), *Models of Political Economy* (London: Sage, 1980); A Lewis, "Attitudes to public expenditure and their relationship to voting preferences", *Political Studies* 28 (1980) 284–92; C A Pissarides, "British government popularity and economic performance", *Economic Journal* 90 (1980) 569–81; P Moseley, "The British economy as represented by the popular press" *Studies in Public Policy* No 105 (Glasgow: Strathclyde University, 1982); J Hudson, "Prime Ministerial popularity in the UK 1960–81", *Political Studies* 32 (1984) 86–97.

⁵ See, for example, B Keith-Lucas, "What price local democracy?", *New Society* 12 August 1976, 340–1.

have not been calculated to clarify local government responsibilities; rather, they have spread confusion in the public mind.⁶

On this perspective, British local government is indeed both representative and responsible. But it is representative of its *local* electorate (at least in a formal sense) yet responsible to central government (and, through central government, to the *national* electorate). So local government is not likely to figure very large in the public imagination, even when people are invited to vote in a local election; they are likely to stay at home or vote in accordance with their attitudes to central government, which dominates the public's image of politics. In short, there is no connection between local elections and local politics—other than accidental interference: paradoxically, *local* elections are part of *national* politics, not local politics.

That is, of course, only one viewpoint. Without disputing the constraints under which local government operates, we might note *first* that these constraints are primarily financial, and non-financial decisions may be salient at least to some voters, in some localities, at some times; *second*, that elections are inherently seductive—they appear to offer choice, and though this may not deceive our logical faculties, it may deceive our emotions. So despite the very tight constraints on local government it is possible that some electors may retain a local orientation at local elections.

Nevertheless the traditional view of local government elections is summed up in Newton's phrase: "the annual general election".⁷ Most analysts have assumed that local government election results are the largely accidental by-product of central government's popularity at local election time. So attention has focused on the implications and consequences of local elections rather than their causes. If local elections have a political message, it is assumed to be a message aimed at central government. If policies need changing to avoid electoral retribution, it is central government policies which are put under scrutiny. If local elections indicate that *government* is unpopular, it is assumed to be *central* government that has offended the electorate.

Thus the impact of policy outputs on elections, which has long been a fashionable topic in analyses of central government, has been neglected in studies of local government. Conversely, the question of whether parties really do make a difference to policy outputs has been the major focus of local government policy studies. The writings of James Alt neatly illustrate the focus on particular causal directions at different levels of government. In his early work on local government he sought to explain budget decisions on the basis of the social and political characteristics of the local authority. In his later work he turned his attention to central government and sought to explain its political popularity on the basis of public attitudes towards economic conditions.⁸

⁶ R A W Rhodes, "Continuity and change in British central—local relations 1979–83", *British Journal of Political Science* 14 (1964) 261–83.

⁷ K Newton, *Second City Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

⁸ J Alt, "Some social and political correlates of county borough expenditures", *British Journal of Political Science* 1 (1971) 49–62; J Alt, "Politics and expenditure models", *Policy and Politics* 5 (1977) 83–92; J Alt, *The Politics of Economic Decline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

This focus on the significance of party for policy has been the prime concern not just in case studies⁹ of local decision making processes but especially in cross-sectional statistical studies that compare one local authority with another. Typically these latter predict a variety of expenditure variables from a range of indicators of needs, resources, and political complexion. Using multiple regressions they seek to determine whether the political predictors add anything to the explanation of budget decisions, once account has been taken of the needs and resources of the area. That is, they ask *does politics matter?*¹⁰

There is so much doubt about whether the political complexion of a local authority has any effect on policy that it has generated a great deal of research. Of course, if that research showed that local politics had a major effect on policy then voters, in their own interests, would be wise to take local as well as national considerations into account when deciding their behaviour in local elections. But the perceptions of ordinary electors are not shaped by obscure academic research reports, and it is the electors' perceptions, right or wrong, that influence electoral behaviour.

Who votes in local elections? Why do they do so? What influences their choice at the polling station? Are they a representative subset of the electorate as a whole? If not, does it matter? In an attempt to answer these questions, the following chapters review the literature on political participation and present some findings from the survey commissioned by the Committee.

⁹ Case studies are reported in J G Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government* (London: Longmans, 1967); H V Wiseman, *Local Government at Work* (London: Routledge, 1967); J Dearlove, *The Politics of Policy in Local Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); K Newton, *Second City Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); W H Cox, *Cities: The Public Dimension* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976); P Saunders, *Urban Politics: A Sociological Interpretation* (London: Hutchinson, 1980).

¹⁰ Examples of these attempts to answer the question "does politics matter?" include F R Oliver and J Stanyer, "Some aspects of the financial behaviour of county boroughs", *Public Administration* 47 (1969) 169-84; N T Boaden, *Urban Policy-Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); N T Boaden and R R Alford, "Sources of diversity in English local government decisions", *Public Administration* 47 (1969) 203-23; J Alt, "Some social and political correlates of county borough expenditures", *British Journal of Political Science* 1 (1971) 49-62; B P Davies, A Barton, I McMillan and V Williamson, *Variations in Services for the Aged* (London: Bell, 1971); B P Davies, A Barton and I McMillan, *Variations in Children's Services among British Urban Authorities* (London: Bell, 1972); R J Nicholson and N Topham, "The determinants of investment in housing by local authorities: an econometric approach", *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series A* 134 (1971) 272-303; R J Nicholson and N Topham, "Investment decisions and the size of local authorities", *Policy and Politics* 1 (1972) 23-44; R J Nicholson and N Topham, "Urban road provision in England and Wales 1962-68", *Policy and Politics* 4 (1976) 3-29; D N King, "Why do local authorities rate poundages differ?", *Public Administration* 51 (1973) 3; D E Ashford, "Resources, spending and party politics in British local government", *Administration and Society* 7 (1975) 286-311; D E Ashford, R Berne and R Schramm, "The expenditure financing decision in British local government", *Policy and Politics* 5 (1976) 5-24; J Alt, "Some social and political correlates of county borough expenditures", *British Journal of Political Science* 1 (1971) 49-62; J Alt, "Politics and expenditure models", *Policy and Politics* 5 (1977) 83-92; J A Schofield, "Determinants of urban service expenditures", *Local Government Studies* 4 (1978) 65-79; J N Danziger, *Making Budgets: Public Resource Allocation* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1978); S Pinch, "Patterns of local authority housing allocation in Greater London", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 3 (1978) 35-54; C D Foster, R A Jackman and M Perlman, *Local Government Finance in a Unitary State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980); L J Sharpe, "Does politics matter? an interim summary with findings" in K Newton (ed), *Urban Political Economy* (London: Pinter, 1981); B Davies and O Coles, "Electoral support, bureaucratic criteria, cost variations, and intra-authority allocations", *Political Studies* 29 (1981) 414-24; T J Karran, "Borough politics and county government: administrative styles in the old structure", *Policy and Politics* 10 (1982) 317-42; K Hoggart, "Explaining policy outputs—English county boroughs 1949-74", *Local Government Studies* 9 (1983) 57-68; G A Boyne, "Output disaggregation and the quest for the impact of local politics", *Political Studies* 32 (1984) 451-60; L J Sharpe and K Newton, *Does Politics Matter? The*

Determinants of Public Policy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). The question is tested in a continental European setting by M Aitken and R Depre, "Politics and policy in Belgian cities", *Policy and Politics* 4 (1976); and by T Hansen and F K Jellberg, "Municipal expenditures in Norway: autonomy and constraints in local government activity", *Policy and Politics* 4 (1976) 25-50; and in an American setting by R I Hofferbert, *The Study of Public Policy* (Indianapolis: Bobs-Merrill, 1974); I Sharkansky, *Spending in the American States* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968); I Sharkansky (ed), *Policy Analysis in Political Science* (Chicago: Markham, 1970).

CHAPTER 3

TURNOUT: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VOTERS AND ELECTORS

TURNOUT LEVELS AT BRITISH LOCAL ELECTIONS

The most obvious feature of local election voting in Britain is the low level of turnout. Newton shows that the turnout rate (defined as the percentage of the registered electorate casting a valid vote) in English county boroughs was around 50% in the late 1940s but declined to around 40% by the mid 1950s and stabilised at that level.¹ The reform of the local government system was partly intended to encourage more participation, but did not do so. The average turnout rates at elections held under the new local government arrangements in the mid-seventies (1973 to 1978) are shown in table 3.1.²

TABLE 3.1

All authorities, Great Britain

Average turnout rates in local elections, 1973–78

	turnout in contested areas %
Upper tier authorities	
Greater London Council	40
English Metropolitan Counties	39
English Shire Counties	42
Welsh Counties	53
Scottish Regions	48
Lower tier authorities	
London Boroughs	40
English Metropolitan Districts	36
English Shire Districts	42
Welsh Districts	52
Scottish Districts	50

Clearly, turnouts in Scotland and Wales were higher than in England but it was still a reasonable approximation to say that the typical local government turnout was around 40%. Turnout almost doubled in 1979 due to the local elections being held on the same day as the general election in many areas but it is now back to the norm—at the 1985 English county elections, for example, it was 41%.³

Even these figures have to be qualified however. In Scotland and Wales about one fifth of councillors were returned unopposed. Unopposed returns were less

¹ K Newton, *Second City Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 15.

² Calculated from T Byrne, *Local Government in Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 106–7.

³ T J Karran and H Bochel, *The County Council Elections in England and Wales 1985* (Dundee: University of Dundee, 1986).

frequent in English non-metropolitan areas and very rare indeed in English metropolitan areas. If we are interested in *actual* electoral turnout, as distinct from the *propensity* to vote, the figures given in Table 3.1 significantly overstate Scottish and Welsh turnouts. Revised figures are shown in Table 3.2.

TABLE 3.2

Scottish and Welsh authorities

Average turnout rates as a percentage of full electorate in contested and non-contested areas		
local authority	% turnout in contested areas	% actual turnout in whole national area
Scottish Regions	48	43
Scottish Districts	50	43
Welsh Counties	53	44
Welsh Districts	52	44

The second qualification concerns the electoral register. All these turnout figures express turnout as the number of voters divided by the number of names on the electoral register. In Britain, unlike the United States, registration is the responsibility of government, not the responsibility of the citizen. Overall, the quality of the British electoral register is high but it is not perfect, and its quality varies sharply across social groups, local authority areas, and time.

According to Todd and Butcher's analysis of a 1981 OPCS survey: "at the time of council elections (ie in May) about 89% of eligible people are registered and still living at their qualifying address and a further 3% still live within the same (Parliamentary) constituency."⁴ Effective non-registration therefore runs at between 8% and 11% in the country as a whole. But it is between 11% and 14% in Wales, and between 16% and 19% in Inner London.⁵ It is also significantly higher amongst the young, the geographically mobile, commonwealth immigrants, and ethnic groups.

Within Inner London non-registration in May of each year runs at 32% amongst those aged under 30 years; at 34% amongst New Commonwealth citizens (who are, of course, legally entitled to vote in British elections); at 27% amongst blacks and 30% amongst Asians (irrespective of citizenship); at 37% amongst the unemployed; and at 50% amongst the young unemployed (aged under 30 years). These are Todd and Butcher's figures for a new register, adjusted for the date of local council elections, by adding 3% to their base-line figures.

In Parliamentary elections the under-registration of certain groups in limited areas may not have a significant effect on the overall national outcome, if only because they constitute a small proportion of the national electorate. However, their concentration in particular localities has more serious implications for local

⁴ J Todd and B Butcher, *Electoral Registration in 1981* (London: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1982), p. 10.

⁵ J Todd and B Butcher, *Electoral Registration in 1981* (London: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1982), p. 11.

government. In some local authorities the electoral register is very different from the eligible population: in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, for example, about a *quarter* of those otherwise eligible to vote in a local election cannot do so because they are not on the register.

Despite the social and ethnic patterns, the key influences on registration seem to be age and mobility. Even in Inner London, the non-registration rate amongst residents of two years standing who are also aged over 30 years is only about 10% at council election time. But these stable residents make up less than two thirds of the eligible local population.

Absolute figures for turnout are not easily interpretable since the achievable maximum level is not obvious: near 100% turnout would simply indicate massive fraud, for example. So we need a point of comparison. Turnout in British Parliamentary elections was unusually high in the 1950 and 1951 elections. Since then it has averaged 76%, never falling beneath 72% nor rising above 79%. Local election turnout is therefore approximately half that in Parliamentary elections. The only exception occurred in 1979 when a snap general election led to simultaneous local and Parliamentary elections in the English and Welsh districts (though not in London or Scotland). Turnout figures in contested local elections rose from 36% (in 1978) to 74% (in 1979) in the English metropolitan districts, from 42% to 76% in the English shire districts, and from 53% to 77% in the Welsh districts. In the Parliamentary election turnout was 76% in England and 79% in Wales. Clearly there are no strong incentives to avoid voting in local government elections provided the elector has already reached the polling station. Lack of positive motivation, not actual antagonism, must therefore explain the difference between turnouts in local government and Parliamentary elections.

However, the fall-off between typical Parliamentary turnout levels and local election turnouts is so large that those who vote in local elections could be very unrepresentative not merely of the eligible population, or of the registered electorate, but even of those who vote regularly in Parliamentary elections. There is a clear electoral cycle to local election results: when a party is in office at Westminster it tends to do badly in local elections, especially in the mid-term of a parliament. That could be because people change their voting choices from year to year. But turnout levels in local elections are so low that the same effect could be produced simply by variations in morale and differential turnout. The local government electorate may not change very rapidly from year to year, but the 40% sub-set who vote in one year may well be quite different from the sub-set who turn out to vote the next year.

In passing, we may note that other comparisons are possible. Turnout in British local government elections is not a great deal less than at American Presidential elections and somewhat more than the turnout for off-year Congressional elections in America or European Parliament elections in the UK. About half of American adults vote in Presidential elections and only a third in US (off-year) Congressional or British European Parliament elections. Moreover, while turnout in American national elections is much lower now than in the last century, turnout in British local government elections has never been high. Complaints about apathy towards local government elections were frequent in the

1920s, 1930s and 1940s and nineteenth century local elections were characterised by abysmally low rates of both of contest and turnout.⁶

PREVIOUS STUDIES OF VOTER TURNOUT IN BRITAIN

Since the war, there has been a growing tendency for specially low turnouts in working class, urban areas.⁷ But amongst individuals the extent of social bias has remained slight. Crewe, Fox and Alt used data from the 1966–74 series of British Election Panel Studies for a thorough analysis of turnout in Parliamentary elections. Over a sequence of four elections they found that only 1% of survey respondents were persistent non-voters. Non-voting in Parliamentary elections was intermittent. Altogether 28% of respondents missed at least one of the four votes, but their non-voting was fairly haphazard. Strong social biases did not show up, and the percentage of regular voters was slightly *higher* (not lower) in the working class than in the middle class. Crewe and his associates discovered “two particularly sturdy sources of irregular voting: relative youth, and a weak or absent party identification”. Both exerted independent effects but strength of “partisanship appears to have a greater bearing than age on turnout regularity”.⁸

The biases produced by these effects were somewhat complex. In every election, non-voters who were poorly motivated and had no interest in politics tended to be Labour supporters, but those more accidental non-voters with higher levels of interest in politics tended more towards the party that was most popular at the time. If this second group of non-voters had voted, they would therefore have made little difference to the result. So the net effect of non-voting was a very small persistent bias against Labour.

Dyer and Jordan took advantage of a legal requirement in Britain that allowed them to inspect the voting registers marked up by polling station officials.⁹ That way they avoided one problem with surveys of non-voting: the tendency for people to claim they had voted when they had not. Their painstaking study revealed the importance of party in two respects: first, psychological identification with a party and second, party activity, especially canvassing. Without these party-based means of mobilising working class people—one psychological, one organisational—there would have been a marked turnout bias against working class people and against the Labour Party.

Nothing so comprehensive has yet been published on turnout patterns in British local government. Byrne lists findings from a variety of local participation studies, none of them very recent.¹⁰ Maud and Redcliffe-Maud both present the results of large scale surveys on local government participation but neither has

⁶ See, for example, E L Hasluck, *Local Government in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948) on Britain between the wars. For a discussion of abysmally low rates of contest and turnout in Scottish cities in the nineteenth century see W L Miller, “Politics in the Scottish City 1832–1982” in G Gordon (ed), *Perspectives of the Scottish City* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1985).

⁷ W L Miller, *Electoral Dynamics* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

⁸ I Crewe, A Fox and J Alt, “Non-voting in British General Elections 1966–Oct. 1974” in C Crouch (ed) *The British Sociology Yearbook Vol. III: Participation* (London: Croom Helm, 1976).

⁹ M C Dyer and A G Jordan, “Who Votes in Aberdeen? Marked Electoral Registers as a Data Source”, *Strathclyde Papers in Government No. 42* (1985).

¹⁰ T Byrne, *Local Government in Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).

much to say about voting.¹¹ The Redcliffe-Maud survey neglects voting entirely and the Maud survey report devotes only three pages to voting. It notes that 75% of survey respondents claimed to have voted in the recent district elections though the official turnout rate had only been 42%. Bealey *et al* and Birch had also noted similar over-reporting of local government turnout by survey respondents.¹²

Beyond that, the Maud survey's only findings on local government voting were: (i) that young people voted less than the middle aged or old and (ii) that actual voting was related—though rather loosely—to having positive attitudes towards voting. These positive attitudes correlated with age, education, and higher socio-economic groups. Positive attitudes to voting also correlated with sex although the Maud report noted that voting, itself, did not.

A number of other surveys, usually local in scope, supplemented by analysis of ward level election results give more direct information about local voting.¹³ These confirm that sex has little effect on turnout and that in Britain, in sharp contrast to the USA, class also has little effect. The middle-aged are specially likely to vote, as are those who live in owner-occupied housing (or even council housing—private renters are least likely to vote), those who have a low rate of geographic mobility, and those with a strong sense of party identification.

Contextual and institutional factors are also influential. Though there is some conflict over the evidence¹⁴ several studies have pointed to the importance of parties, party conflict and party activity in increasing turnout levels.¹⁵ Fletcher confined his research to a study of city ward election results; so he could not be expected to detect psychological influences on turnout. Nonetheless his conclusion boldly states: "the only factors that appear to have influenced (local) turnout are those connected with the keenness of inter-party conflict". He instances marginality, the presence of a Liberal to make the contest three-way rather than two-way, and the existence of a national trend running against the party defending the particular ward and adds: "although there may be other factors influencing turnout in local elections—the overwhelming influence is the closeness of party conflict".

¹¹ "Maud" is the short title for the *Report of Committee on the Management of Local Government. Vol. 3: The Local Government Elector* by Mary Horton (London: HMSO for Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1967); "Redcliffe-Maud" is the short title for *Royal Commission on Local Government in England. Research Study 9. Community Attitudes Survey by Research Services Limited* (London: HMSO Cmnd 4040, 1969).

¹² F Bealey, J Blondel and W P McCann, *Constituency Politics: A Study of Newcastle-under-Lyme* (London: Faber, 1965); A H Birch *et al*, *Small Town Politics: A Study of Political Life in Glossop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

¹³ A H Birch *et al*, *Small Town Politics: A Study of Political Life in Glossop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959); W Hampton, *Democracy and Community: A Study of Politics in Sheffield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); F Bealey, J Blondel and W P McCann, *Constituency Politics: A Study of Newcastle-under-Lyme* (London: Faber, 1965); L J Sharpe (ed), *Voting in Cities: the 1964 Borough Elections* (London: Macmillan, 1967); J Stanyer, "Why Does Turnout Vary?", *New Society* 13 May 1971; J Stanyer, *Understanding Local Government* (London: Fontana, 1976); D Butler and D Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

¹⁴ See K Newton, "Turnout and Marginality in Local Elections", *British Journal of Political Science* 2 (1972) 251–55, for a contrary view.

¹⁵ W Hampton, *Democracy and Community: A Study of Politics in Sheffield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); P Fletcher, "An explanation of variations in turnout in local elections" *Political Studies* 17 (1969) 495–502.

There is a tendency in rural areas towards a lack of contest because the incumbent councillor is personally known to his electors who may not wish to give offence by opposing him¹⁶ but in areas where uncontested seats are the norm, such contests as do occur may produce a high turnout.¹⁷ Turnout tends to be less in larger authorities and areas with a relatively transient population¹⁸ which fits Verba and Nie's "decline of community model": "as communities grow in size, and, more important, as they lose those characteristics of boundedness that distinguish the independent city from the suburb, participation (in local politics, not in national politics) declines".¹⁹

Because the average level of turnout in local government elections is so low there is evidence that special efforts by party canvassers can certainly increase turnout and sometimes swing elections results. Fletcher suggested that differential turnout effects produce larger swings in local elections than in national—though the relative size of wards compared to constituencies would also tend to produce the same effect. Consequently, he claimed, the rule of thumb that Parliamentary constituencies with a party lead of 5% were marginal, in the sense of being likely to change hands, went with a rather different rule for local government wards: wards with party majorities of under 20% were marginal in his view.²⁰ Whatever the national average swings individual wards might deviate from it by a large amount. Similar findings in the context of American Congressional elections led Mann to title his book *Unsafe at Any Margin*.²¹ The influence of party campaigns on local turnout has been reported in studies of Harrow, Ashford, Wolverhampton, West Hartlepool, Newcastle, Lancaster and Dundee.²²

Once again Newton puts the contrary view that in Birmingham at least "turnout in marginal wards has little or nothing to do with the closeness of the party competition, the involvement of the electorate in a closely fought campaign, or the efficiency of local party machinery".²³ However his own study of Birmingham shows that turnout was higher in marginal wards, though he regarded the correlation as too weak to be significant.²⁴

¹⁶ For extreme examples see R Masterson and E Masterson, "The Scottish community elections: the second round", *Local Government Studies* 6 (1980) 63–82.

¹⁷ J Stanyer, *Understanding Local Government* (London: Fontana, 1976).

¹⁸ J Stanyer, "Why Does Turnout Vary?", *New Society* 13 May 1971.

¹⁹ S Verba and N H Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

²⁰ P Fletcher, "An explanation of variations in turnout in local elections" *Political Studies* 17 (1969) 495–502.

²¹ T E Mann, *Unsafe at Any Margin* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1978).

²² J M Bochel and D T Denver, "Canvassing, Turnout and Party Support: an Experiment", *British Journal of Political Science* 1 (1971) 257–69; J M Bochel and D T Denver, "The Impact of the Campaign on the Results of Local Government Elections", *British Journal of Political Science* 2 (1972) 239–44; A Bruce and G Lee, "Local election campaigns", *Political Studies* 30 (1982) 247–61; J C Brown, "Local Party Efficiency as a factor in the outcome of British elections", *Political Studies* 6 (1958) 174–78; T Brown, M J C Vile and M F Whitmore, "Community Studies and Decision Taking", *British Journal of Political Science* 2 (1972) 133–53; J Gyford, *Local Politics in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1976, 1984); G W Jones, "Wolverhampton" in L J Sharpe (ed), *Voting in Cities: the 1964 Borough Elections* (London: Macmillan, 1967); A Rees, "West Hartlepool" in L J Sharpe (ed), *Voting in Cities: the 1964 Borough Elections* (London: Macmillan, 1967); B Pimlott, "Does Local Party Organisation Matter?", *British Journal of Political Science* 2 (1972) 381–3; B Pimlott, "Local Party Organisation, Turnout and Marginality", *British Journal of Political Science* 3 (1973) 252–55.

²³ This time the contrary view appears in K Newton, "Turnout and Marginality in Local Elections", *British Journal of Political Science* 2 (1972) 251–55.

²⁴ K Newton, *Second City Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

Newton correlates ward turnouts in Birmingham over the 1949–1971 period with a variety of spatial and temporal variables. Most of the correlations are too small to achieve statistical significance. Nonetheless it is worth mentioning some of these small correlations while cautioning against over-interpretation. Turnout was higher when polling days were sunny, lower when they were wet; turnout was higher in marginal wards; turnout increased as the next (Parliamentary) general election came closer; turnout was lower in wards with transient populations. But the only finding that Newton himself chooses to stress is the large correlation between low turnout in Birmingham local elections, and the level of “don’t knows” in the national Gallup Polls. “When political issues are not clear cut and there is no strong preference for one of the parties, one would expect a relatively high percentage of don’t knows and a low turnout. This is the case in local elections. The finding serves to underline the conclusion that the main determinants of (local) turnout are not to be found within the community but rather in the country as a whole”.²⁵

Other work has also pointed to the domination of national politics over local turnout. Butler and Stokes centred their study of Parliamentary voting around the concept of psychological identification with the national parties.²⁶ It was measured by two questions:

- (i) *The partisan direction question*: Generally speaking do you usually think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, or Liberal, or what?
- (ii) *The partisan strength question*: How strongly [chosen party] do you generally feel—very strongly, fairly strongly, or not very strongly?

TABLE 3.3

Samples of British electorate

	Turnout rates by strength of party identification		
	strength of party identification		
	not very	fairly	very strong
% who voted in 1966 General Election (Miller <i>et al</i>)	73	86	90
% who voted in all four General Elections: 1966–1974 (Crewe <i>et al</i>)	54	74	84
% who voted in 1963 Local Government Elections (Butler and Stokes)	39	54	64
% who voted in 1965 Local Government Elections (Miller <i>et al</i>)	39	53	65
% who voted in Local Government Elections 1967–1969 (Miller <i>et al</i>)	41	53	63

²⁵ K Newton, *Second City Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 28.

²⁶ D Butler and D Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

For an analysis of turnout, the second question is the important one. It measures the strength of attachment to parties. As we noted earlier, Crewe *et al* found that strength of partisanship was the strongest influence on turnout in British *general elections*.²⁷ Butler and Stokes showed that it was a similarly powerful influence on voting in *local elections*.²⁸ Analysis of a parallel survey for the Conservative Party by Miller, Tagg and Britto confirms this.²⁹ The results of all three are shown in Table 3.3.

Butler and Stokes also presented other evidence that voters in local elections were nationally oriented. Their sample showed a "lack of involvement in local issues". When they asked those who had voted in the May 1963 local elections whether there were any issues that had especially concerned them, "four out of five said no without hesitation; the remainder mentioned matters that were in fact more often the concern of Westminster than of the Town Hall".³⁰ However, their respondents gave those replies in the context of an interview that focused overwhelmingly on national politics, and other surveys have detected more interest in local issues.

What evidence there is on British local government turnout is disparate with each study tending to emphasise the overwhelming importance of one of the influences it researched, while neglecting the possible influence of factors that were not included in that particular research study. Taken together, however, they highlight the importance of parties both at the individual level (in terms of psychological identification with parties) and at the aggregate level in terms of the nature of party competition (the existence of a full range of party candidatures, the closeness of the competition, the strength of party organisation). They highlight the mobilising influences on voting rather than the purely personal characteristics of the electors. And they stress the importance of national political factors rather than local. Party identification is assumed to be a psychological link to the national parties, and trends in the popularity of national parties are reflected in the overall levels of turnout³¹ and in differential turnout.³²

EXPLANATORY MODELS OF VOTER TURNOUT

What are we trying to explain?

Studies of participation in local politics have been conducted by the Maud Committee on the Management of Local Government, by the Redcliffe-Maud Commission and by National Opinion Polls.³³ Unfortunately their definition of par-

²⁷ I Crewe, A Fox and J Alt, "Non-voting in British General Elections 1966–Oct. 1974" in C Crouch (ed) *The British Sociology Yearbook Vol. III: Participation* (London: Croom Helm, 1976).

²⁸ D Butler and D Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 40–44.
²⁹ W L Miller, S Tagg and K Britto, "Partisanship and Party Preference in Government and Opposition: The Mid-Term Perspective", *Electoral Studies* 5 (1986).

³⁰ D Butler and D Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 41.

³¹ K Newton, *Second City Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

³² P Fletcher, "An explanation of variations in turnout in local elections" *Political Studies* 17 (1969) 495–502.

³³ *Report of Committee on the Management of Local Government. Vol. 3: The Local Government Elector* by Mary Horton (London: HMSO for Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1967); *Royal Commission on Local Government in England. Research Study 9. Community Attitudes Survey by Research Services Limited* (London: HMSO Cmd 4040, 1969); National Opinion Polls, "Public participation in local government" *Political Social Economic Review* 1 (1975) 17–34.

ticipation was rather wide and did not focus on electoral turnout. The 1975 NOP study for example, analysed a wide range of participatory behaviour of a campaigning or pressure-group kind, but did not include local election voting in its list of participatory behaviours. Perversely, this NOP study of local government participation included a measure of *Parliamentary* election turnout, but not local turnout (Although the survey was about various forms of local participation the only question about voting was whether respondents had voted in the last Parliamentary general election). Similarly, the Maud and Redcliffe-Maud surveys focused on participatory *attitudes* and only touched briefly on actual local election voting turnout.

It has been fashionable in recent participation studies to neglect voting and concentrate on other forms of participation.³⁴ Some aspects of non-electoral political participation are considered in Gyford's paper in *Research Volume IV*. But while there are valid reasons for studying participatory attitudes or non-electoral kinds of political participation, this is no substitute for an analysis of voting itself.

Before looking at detailed findings for Britain we need to set out a broad theoretical framework into which the details may fit. Complex cross-national studies of political participation by various teams have established two important propositions about mass political participation which are highly relevant to our interpretation of British studies³⁵:

(i) There are several *modes* of political participation. These include voting; campaigning; community pressure; direct action; and contacting elected or appointed officials on personal matters. Although these are positively correlated—that is, individuals who engage in one form of participation tend also to engage in others—the correlations are weak, and the factors which encourage one form of participation may have little influence on others.

(ii) There is a critical difference between participatory *attitudes* and actual participation. The difference is systematic and explicable. Some people have very participatory attitudes but are “locked-out” of actual participation while others, who lack participatory attitudes are “mobilised” into actual participation by the political institutions that dominate a particular political system. Mobilisation is particularly relevant to voting; lockout is more relevant to other modes of participation.

System effects and individual effects: the interaction

Verba, Nie and Kim's analysis centres on the interaction between the individual and the laws and institutions that characterise the political system. Everywhere, they suggest, there is a pervasive natural tendency for the individual's personal “socio-economic resources” to encourage political participation. By “socio-

³⁴ Examples include R Darke and R Walker (eds), *Local Government and the Public* (London: Leonard Hill, 1977); D Hill, *Participating in Local Affairs* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970); D M Hill, *Democratic Theory and Local Government* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974); G Parry (ed), *Participation in Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972).

³⁵ S Verba and N H Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); S Verba, N H Nie and J Kim, *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven National Comparison* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978); S Barnes and M Kaase, *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979).

economic resources" they mean primarily education and income. But these personal resources only directly encourage the will and motivation to participate; that is they affect participatory attitudes directly and participation only indirectly. Again this is particularly true for voting. Some campaign activities need wealth or education for their performance: the act of voting requires neither. Lack of wealth and education does not prevent the act of voting but it reduces the personal motivation to vote.

So in the complete absence of institutional constraints or promptings, we should expect that in all elections, everywhere, there would be a strong correlation between voting turnout and personal socio-economic resources simply because participatory attitudes would determine actual participation. But all political systems do include institutional constraints and institutional inducements. The actual pattern of participation will therefore depend upon whether these non-personal, system factors offset the natural correlation between turnout and socio-economic resources, or whether system factors intensify the natural correlation.

In the USA most institutional factors operate so as to encourage even higher rates of voting turnout by those with high socio-economic resources and a natural propensity to turnout anyway. The critical difference between the USA and Western Europe in this respect is the absence in the former of a major working class party to mobilise those with low socio-economic resources and weak participatory attitudes into actual voting. In Britain the strength of a major working class party should, in the past, have provided a major stimulus to working class voter turnout. But as British voting becomes less class polarised, and as the strength of identification with parties declines, the natural tendency for the educated and the comfortably-off to dominate electoral participation may become more evident.

Some studies have identified large numbers of factors related to turnout.³⁶ But not all of these factors are equally important and some apparent influences on turnout may simply reflect other, deeper influences. A recent study by Wolfinger and Rosenstone used multivariate analysis to determine the relative importance of various factors underlying American turnout patterns. Its "core finding" pointed to the "transcendent importance of education".³⁷ Income, occupational class, and even some age effects were small once education was taken into account, and (social status) cross-pressure effects were non-existent. Occupation affected turnout, but it was specific job experience rather than occupational class (or status) that had a major impact—government employees, for example, were specially prone to vote. Some institutional factors were also important: restrictive registration laws in some states depressed overall national turnout by up to 9%—a good example of institutional "lock-out".

A two-step model of voter turnout

We have then a simple two-step model. Personal characteristics will produce participatory attitudes; participatory attitudes will combine with institutional

³⁶ See for example the classic by L W Milbrath, *Political Participation* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965).

³⁷ R E Wolfinger and S J Rosenstone, *Who Votes?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 102.

constraints and prompting to produce actual participation. The first step will produce a large socio-economic bias, which may then be reduced or intensified by the second step.

In its application to British elections, in contrast to those in the United States, we should expect the second step to operate to offset and reduce the natural social biases of the first step. Great Britain has a strong party committed to working class interests which should mobilise working class people both psychologically through identification with the Labour Party, and organisationally through intensive canvassing of working class housing areas for example. These effects should happen in both local and parliamentary elections.

System characteristics of local government elections

Verba and his associates, like most analysts of participation in the United States, were primarily interested in the relationship between social inequality and political inequality. Consequently the aspects of institutional constraints and mobilisations that interested them were those aspects that differentially affected *high status and low status individuals*.

Our concern is rather different. If we are to understand turnout in local government we should pay some attention to those aspects of institutional constraints and mobilisations that differentially affect turnout in *national and local elections*.

Let us start with Martin Lipset's classic international study of *Political Man*.³⁸ He presents the two tables reproduced here as Tables 3.4 and 3.5. The first is a non-theoretic listing of observed regularities that tend to occur in all countries, at all times, and in all kinds of elections. The second table constitutes an attempt at a theoretical explanation of these observed correlations.

Lipset supports his explanations with a wealth of data and argument. For present purposes they provide a useful structured checklist, and it is not too difficult to see how they relate to British local government. We cannot read Lipset's list of the various ways in which government policy may appear relevant to the individual without being reminded of local government's lack of autonomy. Let us run through the points on his list in Table 3.5. Local government budgets are large, local government employs (directly) far more people than central government. But its revenue, expenditure and employment are all visibly controlled by central government. Local government is not responsible for major economic decisions such as subsidies to agriculture or industry. Its influence over moral or religious policies is slight. Contenders for local government office are not usually seen as offering dramatic policy alternatives. And local government elections cannot be held in a crisis atmosphere when central government stands such close watch over local councils. (Crisis is, of course, an over-worked word in political journalism, and the *word* is frequently used in a local government context, but clearly not with the same depth of meaning as when applied to a national crisis). In short, when we go through Lipset's list, we are struck by the *irrelevance* of local government to the individual.

³⁸ Another classic, originally published in 1959, but recently updated: S M Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics: Updated Edition* (London: Heinemann, 1983). The tables of observations and explanations appear on pp. 189-90 of the updated edition.

TABLE 3.4**Lipset's table of observations**

social characteristics correlated with voting turnout	
higher turnout	lower turnout
High income	Low income
High education	Low education
Occupational groups:	Occupational groups:
Businessmen	Unskilled workers
White-collar employees	Servants
Government employees	Service workers
Commercial crop farmers	Peasants, subsistence farmers
Whites	Negroes
Men	Women
Middle-aged people (35–55)	Young people (under 35)
Old people (over 55)	
Old residents in community	Newcomers in community
Workers in Western Europe	Workers in United States
Crisis situations	Normal situations
Married people	Single
Members of organisations	Isolated individuals

TABLE 3.5**Lipset's table of explanations**

- social factors affecting rates of voting turnout**
- 1. The relevance of government policies to the individual**
 - a. Dependence on government as one's employer
 - b. Exposure to economic pressures requiring government action
 - c. Exposure to government economic restrictions
 - d. Possession of moral or religious values affected by government policies
 - e. Availability of relevant policy alternatives
 - f. General crisis situations
 - 2. Access to information**
 - a. Direct visibility of effects of government policies
 - b. Occupational training and experience making for general insight
 - c. Contact and communication
 - d. Amount of leisure
 - 3. Group pressure to vote or not vote**
 - a. Under-privilege and alienation (reduced turnout)
 - b. Strength of class political organisation
 - c. Extent of social contacts
 - d. Group norms opposing voting (reduced turnout)
 - 4. Cross-pressures (which reduce turnout)**
 - a. Conflicting interests
 - b. Conflicting information
 - c. Conflicting group pressures

Note. All factors listed **increase** turnout unless there is a contrary indication.

This irrelevance is reflected in lack of access to information and public visibility. Insofar as information depends upon the individual receiving it there will be variations between individuals. But insofar as it depends upon the object of that information, turnout will be depressed by the generally low visibility of local government.

A two-level, two-step model of voter turnout

If we are to take into account the subordinate role of local government in British politics, as well as the distinction between personal motivations and institutional inducement towards voter turnout, then we need a model that encompasses the two levels of politics (national and local) as well as the two steps (personal motivation of interest and institutional constraint). Diagrammatically the *simplest* such model would look like that in Figure 3.1.

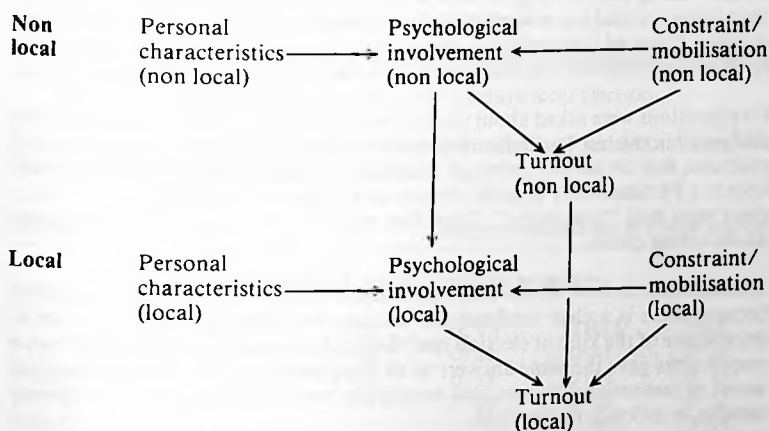


FIGURE 3.1

The structure of a two-level, two-step model of voter turnout

Much more complex, interactive models might well be specified. This is intended as a relatively simple but realistic model. The arrows indicate major causal effects relevant to the explanation of local government turnout.

In the top line of the diagram psychological involvement with national politics is shown as dependent upon both personal and institutional factors. Turnout in national elections is shown as dependent upon both involvement and institutional factors.

The lower line of the diagram deals with local variables. Psychological involvement in local politics is portrayed as dependent upon personal characteristics with a local dimension (length of residence in the locality, for example) and institutional factors with a local dimension (paying rates, for example). Local election turnout is shown as dependent upon local involvement and local constraint/mobilisation factors.

The two vertical lines indicate important links between national and local politics. Psychological involvement in local politics is shown as dependent upon general psychological involvement in (national) politics. And turnout in local elections is shown as dependent upon turnout in national elections.

As sketched out here, this is just the bare framework of a model that would seem to account for local election turnout in terms of general findings drawn from international studies of political participation. But we can now go on to measure this model against some new data from the survey commissioned by the Committee.

SOME NEW SURVEY FINDINGS ON TURNOUT PATTERNS

NOP Market Research carried out their survey in December 1985. Although the design, timing and coverage of this survey were less than ideal (it was a single wave survey carried out at some distance from any local election date and subject to severe financial constraints) it does provide a reasonably good source of up-to-date information on the electorate's attitudes to local government elections.

Five questions were asked about voter turnout: namely, whether the respondent *had voted* in the last Parliamentary election (1983), the last county or regional elections, and the last city, borough or district elections; and whether they *would vote* in a Parliamentary general election and local council election if such elections were held "tomorrow". Then five corresponding questions were asked about voting choice.

It is essential to look at the answers to these five turnout questions *together* because there is a clear tendency for factors that influence turnout to do so *irrespective* of the kind of election specified in the question. That does not mean respondents gave the same answers to all five questions. But it does mean that social or institutional factors that encourage voter turnout tend to encourage turnout in *all* kinds of elections.

Careful design of the questions in this survey prevented a repetition of the gross over-reporting of local election turnout that occurred in the Maud survey.³⁹ Overall the turnout figures in this new survey were:—

Reported turnout in 1983 Parliamentary election	77%
Reported turnout in last county election	54%
Reported turnout in last district election	56%
Certain intention to vote in future Parliamentary election	63%
Certain intention to vote in future local election	45%

Given the inaccuracies of the electoral register, the reported turnout figures are acceptable, though they do indicate some over-reporting of local election turnout. The *fall-off* in turnout between national and local elections is 22% in these survey reports of past voting and 18% in intentions about future voting. In

³⁹ *Report of Committee on the Management of Local Government. Vol. 3: The Local Government Elector* by Mary Horton (London: HMSO for Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1967).

actual voting the drop-off is around 30-35%. Nonetheless, survey respondents clearly do distinguish between their turnout in local and national elections. But, as we shall see, those *categories* of elector that tend to turn out and vote more than others—for example, those with a high interest in politics, tend to have higher than average turnout rates on *all five* of the turnout questions.

Because those who are most likely to turn out in one kind of election are also the most likely to turn out in others, even if overall levels of turnout vary, the correlations between the five turnout measures are quite strong. These correlations are shown in Table 3.6. For brevity, in Table 3.6 and throughout this report, the five turnout measures are represented by the following mnemonics:

- T83: Reported turnout in 1983 Parliamentary election
 TCTY: Reported turnout in last county election
 TDIST: Reported turnout in last district election
 TGE: “Certain” intention to vote in future Parliamentary election
 TLG: “Certain” intention to vote in future local election.

Again, for brevity, the term “county” is used for all upper-tier elections, and the term “district” for all lower-tier elections.

TABLE 3.6

All respondents to 1985 NOP survey

Correlations (*) between turnout measures					
	TLG	TGE	TCTY	TDIST	T83
TLG	1.00	0.64	0.51	0.47	0.26
TGE		1.00	0.35	0.29	0.37
TCTY			1.00	0.63	0.32
TDIST				1.00	0.35
T83					1.00

* All correlations in this report are Pearson product-moment correlations calculated either on dichotomies or on equal interval coded ordinal variables. In principle they can range up to 1.00 though with survey data they are usually much lower. Negative correlations indicate inverse relationships.

The highest correlation 0.64 in this table is between the two statements of *intention* (whether local or national). The next highest, and almost equal in size 0.63, is the correlation between reported turnout in the two kinds of *local* election (county and district). Some way behind are the correlations 0.51 and 0.47 between *past and future local* election turnout. And a long way behind, the next is 0.37 between *past and future Parliamentary* turnout.

To avoid an excess of statistics, this chapter presents full details of patterns of intention to vote in future local elections, but only summary measures of the (usually similar) patterns of turnout according to the other turnout measures. By way of introducing these statistics, let us look at the relationship between turnout and age, using this standard presentation format.

TABLE 3.7

All respondents

The relationship between turnout and age					
					turnout (TLG)
					%
Age:	Young (under 35)				27
	Middle-aged (35–54)				48
	55 and over				57
Correlations					
with	TLG	TGE	TCTY	TDIST	T83
Age	0.24	0.16	0.26	0.27	0.15

The first part of Table 3.7 shows the percentages of respondents in different age categories who stated that they would be "certain" to turn out in a local election held "tomorrow". The old were over twice as likely to vote (57%) as the young (27%). The second part of the table shows the correlations between age and each of the five turnout measures. The relationship between age and TLG shown in the first part of the table corresponds to a correlation of 0.24. We can regard this 0.24 correlation coefficient as a summary of the relationship between age and the intention to turn out in local elections. (It takes into account both the degree of "fit" between turnout and age, and also the extent to which people are evenly spread over the age categories). More to the point, we can compare this correlation with the other four correlations, showing the relationship between age and other kinds of voter turnout. Looking across the row of correlations we can see that age correlates about equally well with all three measures of local turnout and rather less well with the two measures of Parliamentary turnout.

In general we might expect correlations with local turnout to be rather higher than with Parliamentary turnout simply because so many people vote in Parliamentary elections. If *everyone* voted, there would be *no* correlation between turnout and anything else. Lower turnouts in local elections allow the possibility (no more than that) that the drop-off will occur non-randomly and intensify (or even change) the patterns evident in parliamentary turnout. Having gone through this table in some detail we can now look, more briefly, at a wider range of influences on turnout.

Survey variables relevant to the two-level, two-step model of voter turnout

Figure 3.1 sketched a simple model of voter turnout in Parliamentary and local elections. It was based on the concepts of *personal characteristics*, *psychological involvement*, and *constraint/mobilisation* factors. Each of these was subdivided into two levels: *national* and *local*.

The NOP survey includes a number of questions that may serve as indicators of these concepts. They are listed below, under the three concept headings, with, in brackets, a note of whether the indicator seems to have a specifically *local* dimension.

Concept 1: Personal characteristics

- Age
- Sex
- Employment status
- Education
- Class
- House tenure (local)
- Length of local residence (local)

Concept 2: Psychological involvement

- Interest in national politics
- Discussion of national politics
- Interest in local politics (local)
- Discussion of local politics (local)
- Knowledge of county name (local)
- Knowledge of district name (local)
- Knowledge of local councillors' names (local)
- Knowledge of local councillors' parties (local)
- Knowledge of which party controls county (local)
- Knowledge of which party controls district (local)

Concept 3: Mobilisation/constraint factors

- Feel strongly on political issues
- Have strong sense of psychological identification with a party
- Read an informative paper
- Concern about local issues (local)
- Feel most important political issue is matter for local rather than national government (local)
- Blame local councils for cash shortages (local)
- View on how well county council is running things (local)
- View on how well district council is running things (local)
- Ever wanted to complain about local government (local)
- Ever actually complained about local government (local)
- Pay rates (local)
- Use local news media (local)
- Psychological alienation from local government and elections (local)
- Attitude to local government autonomy (local)
- Perception of marginality of local council (local)

We can look at the relationship between turnout and each of these groups of indicators in turn, before going on to a more formal evaluation of the two-step, two-level model itself.

Turnout by personal characteristics Of the seven personal characteristics in Table 3.8 the only two which correlate appreciably with turnout are age and length of residence. Older people and longer term residents are more likely to vote. These variables correlate with all five turnout measures, and correlate a little more strongly with local than national turnout.

Negative findings can easily be overlooked. Let us emphasise that correlations

TABLE 3.8

All respondents

The relationship between turnout and personal characteristics

		turnout (TLG)
		%
Age:	Young (under 35)	27
	Middle-aged (35–54)	48
	Old (over 55)	57
Sex:	Male	47
	Female	42
Empl:	In full-time employment	41
	In part-time employment	45
	Unemployed	37
Educ:	Terminal age of education under 15 years	51
	Terminal age of education 16 years	35
	Terminal age of education 17 years	42
	Terminal age of education 18 years	38
	Terminal age of education 19 years	45
Class:	AB	51
	C1	45
	C2	40
	D	43
	E	46
Tenure:	Owner	42
	Rent from council	50
	Rent from housing association	56
	Rent from private landlord	44
Resident:	In locality for under 1 year	51
	In locality for 1–2 years	36
	In locality for 2–5 years	35
	In locality for 5–10 years	36
	In locality for over 10 years	49

Correlations

with	TLG	TGE	TCTY	TDIST	T83
Age	24	16	26	27	15
Sex	–5	–6	–4	–3	–3
Empl	–1	–2	–1	–3	–8
Educ	–6	–4	–4	–4	–2
Class	–3	–8	–7	–3	–7
Resident	7	6	15	18	14

Note: for ease of reading, all correlations in this and subsequent tables are multiplied by 100 to eliminate the leading zero and decimal point.

between turnout and sex, employment status, education and class are *very low*. Turnout is *slightly* less amongst women, amongst the unemployed, amongst the lower social classes and amongst those who left school at age 16 (the high turnout amongst those who left school at younger ages is the consequence of such people being older—they left school when statutory leaving ages were lower than they now are). Verba and his associates argue very strongly that these are *unnaturally* weak correlations. If *only* personal factors operated we should expect much more social inequality in turnout rates. These *low* correlations therefore provide indirect evidence of strong mobilising or constraint factors.

Turnout by psychological involvement Generally there is more correlation between turnout and measures of psychological involvement than between turnout and social characteristics. Altogether we have ten measures of people's interest in and knowledge about politics. There is very little correlation between turnout and knowledge of which party controls local councils. But there are appreciable correlations with interest in and discussion about both local and national politics; and again, with knowledge of local councillors' names or their parties. Those with a great deal of interest in local politics expressed over twice as much intention to turnout (74%) as those with no interest in local politics (31%).

However it is striking that the correlations vary little according to the level (ie national or local) of turnout, interest or discussion. Comparing the column for TLG with that for TGE, or those for TCTY and TDIST with that for T83, there is a tendency for interest and discussion of *national politics* to correlate slightly more with *national turnout* while interest and discussion of *local politics* correlate slightly more with *local turnout*—but these variations in correlations are slight, even though they are consistent across a range of indicators.

More persuasive evidence of independent local political influences comes from the pattern of correlations between turnout and *knowledge*, particularly knowledge of councillors' names. Knowledge of councillors' names correlated twice as strongly with local election turnout (TCTY and TDIST) as with Parliamentary turnout (T83). This national/local distinction was less evident in correlations with other forms of local political knowledge however.

So while local turnout does vary sharply with involvement with local politics, it varies almost as sharply with involvement in national politics. We must suspect that interest and discussion of local politics reflects to a large extent general involvement with politics in all its manifestations: local interest is not purely local.

Turnout by Mobilisation/Constraint Factors Let us start with those mobilisation factors that have no specifically local content. The survey included measures of three such factors—strong feelings about issues or parties and newspaper readership. Reading a paper, especially something more heavyweight than a tabloid does seem to exert a small influence towards turnout, a little more influence on national rather than local turnout. *Psychologically* mobilising factors have more effect. Turnout correlates more with strong feelings on political issues and most of all with strong feelings of party identification. Strong party identifiers have an intended local government turnout rate almost twice as great as weak identifiers and six times as great as non-identifiers.

TABLE 3.9

All respondents

The relationship between turnout and psychological involvement

			turnout (TLG)
			%
Nat int:	Interest in national politics	—none at all	34
		—not much	36
		—a fair amount	50
		—a great deal	64
Nat disc:	Discuss national politics	—never	36
		—rarely	31
		—occasionally	47
		—quite often	60
Loc int:	Interest in local politics	—none at all	31
		—not much	39
		—a fair amount	56
		—a great deal	74
Loc disc:	Discuss local politics	—never	35
		—rarely	36
		—occasionally	53
		—quite often	68

Know:*	County name	Dist name	Name of councillors	Party of councillors	Party of county	Party of dist
don't know	38%	37%	39%	31%	n.a.	n.a.
wrong answer	41%	48%	43%	42%	43%	50%
right answer	50%	48%	56%	53%	50%	50%

Correlations with:	TLG	TGE	TCTY	TDIST	T83
Nat int	19	23	17	15	20
Nat disc	19	26	14	15	19
Loc int	23	19	23	23	21
Loc disc	22	21	22	21	19
Know county name	11	13	13	15	9
Know distr name	10	13	11	13	12
Know councillors name	16	10	24	24	10
Know councillors pty	21	18	27	23	19
Know pty control cty	6	3	12	8	2
Know pty control dist	0	3	3	2	4

* In the part of the table which deals with knowledge, the percentages do not refer to the numbers of respondents who had the various items of knowledge, but to the turnout rates amongst the knowledgeable and the ignorant. That is, they have the same meaning as all the other percentages in the table.

TABLE 3.10

All respondents

The relationship between turnout and national mobilisation/constraint factors						
					turnout (TLG)	
					%	
Iss:	do not feel strongly on any issue				38	
	do feel strongly on some issue				50	
Pty ID:	feeling of identification with a party—				none	11
					not very strong	36
					fairly strong	44
					very strong	65
Paper:					read no paper	43
					read tabloid	43
					read	
					non-tabloid	51
Correlations with:		TLG	TGE	TCTY	TDIST	T83
Iss		12	19	11	10	10
Pty ID		27	21	24	22	36
Paper		5	8	9	7	11

Naturally, a survey focused on local government included a wider range of questions about *locally* oriented mobilising factors, but these generally had less effect on turnout than did party identification.

Those who list specific local issues that they claim influence their choice in local government elections have a slight tendency to turn out more—though in Parliamentary elections as much as local elections. But those who, in answer to another question, state that their principal issue of concern is more a matter for local government rather than national government show only the merest trace of higher than average turnout in local elections (and lower than average turnout in Parliamentary).

Satisfaction with the way local councils are running things has an inherently ambiguous relationship to turnout. Those who are well satisfied may turn out in a fit of good humour, those who are dissatisfied may turn out to protest. Overall there is practically no correlation between satisfaction and turnout.

The desire to complain about local affairs might be considered another ambiguous influence on turnout. Again there is little difference in turnout between those who have and those who have not ever wanted to complain. On the other hand, there is an appreciable correlation between actually complaining and actually voting—though that is explicable more in terms of activity/inactivity than satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

Rate paying and rate rebates show very little relation to turnout—perhaps to the surprise of those who are inclined to over-intellectualise or over-rationalise the

TABLE 3.11

All respondents

**The relationship between turnout and local
mobilisation/constraint factors I**

		turnout (TLG)
		%
Loc iss concern:	(when voting in local elections)	
	do not take account of local issues	41
	do take account of local issues	49
Loc/nat iss:	feel most important issue a matter	
	for central government	50
	for both	56
	for local councils	45
Blame:	blame government for local cash shortages	43
	blame both for local cash shortages	44
	blame councils for local cash shortages	48
Sat cty:	county council runs things	
	—not at all well	51
	—fairly well	44
	—very well	45
Sat dist:	district council runs things	
	—not at all well	49
	—fairly well	43
	—very well	49
Compl want:	ever wanted to complain about local council—	no 43
		yes 46
Compl actual:	(amongst those who have ever wanted to complain to local council)	
	—have not complained	38
	—have complained	50
Pay rates:	no	45
	yes	45
Rate rebate:	no rebate	45
	rebate (unknown whether part or full)	50
	partial rebate	44
	full rebate	44
Use local media:	read daily paper	
	—national	43
	—local	56
	take evening paper	
	—no	43
	—yes	47
	take local weekly	
	—no	43
	—yes	45
	watch local TV news	
	—no	35
	—yes	47
	listen to local radio news	
	—no	44
	—yes	46

Correlations with:	TLG	TGE	TCTY	TDIST	T83
Loc iss concern	8	9	7	10	8
Loc/nat iss	-1	-2	2	3	-4
Blame	5	2	7	7	6
Sat cty	-5	-3	1	1	0
Sat dist	-2	2	3	3	6
Comp want	2	2	4	6	7
Comp actual	11	6	16	13	8
Pay rates	0	1	4	7	6
Rate rebate	-3	4	5	4	6
Local media use					
Morning	8	4	10	4	2
Evening	3	2	4	0	9
Weekly	2	2	5	4	0
TV	10	6	7	6	2
Radio	3	2	6	7	1

behaviour of mass electorates. Significantly almost all respondents claim they do pay rates until they are specifically questioned about rebates. Psychologically, local electorates are ratepayers, whether or not they actually pay them.

Our five measures of exposure to local news media show a very consistent tendency for those who read local papers or listen to local news on radio or TV to have above average turnout rates, but the effects are small, though slightly greater on local turnout than national.

We used four measures of political alienation from local politics, all of which correlate with turnout, and all correlate a little more strongly with local than national turnout. The weakest relationship is with attitudes towards politicians' broken promises. There is a stronger relationship with feelings that votes determine what happens in the locality. The strongest relationships are between turnout and attitudes to elections being "too complicated to understand" or involving "so many people" that individual votes do not count. Although these last two variables correlate very well with turnout, they are so close to an expressed intention to turn out (or not turn out) that the *span* of explanation provided by these variables is not great, whatever its *strength*. There is danger that we are almost measuring turnout intention twice with different forms of words.

We also have four measures of perceived or desired autonomy for local government. In strict correlational terms three of these measures are almost unrelated to turnout, while the remaining one—which measures attitudes towards replacing elected councillors with central government appointees—has a negative relation to turnout: that is, those who are more antagonistic to the notion of local government autonomy have higher local election turnout rates. However, inspection of the percentage figures in the earlier part of the table shows a curvilinear pattern. Turnout rates are highest amongst those at the extremes of

TABLE 3.12

All respondents

The relationship between turnout and local mobilisation/constraint factors II: alienation from local government

	turnout (TLG)
	%
Broken promises: The people you vote for say they'll do things for you but once they're in they forget what they've said	
—strongly disagree	65
—disagree	56
—neither	48
—agree	42
—strongly agree	40
Votes decide: The way that people vote at local council elections is the main thing that decides how things are run in this area	
—strongly disagree	41
—disagree	33
—neither	34
—agree	50
—strongly agree	63
Complex: Local council elections are sometimes so complicated that I really don't know who to vote for	
—strongly disagree	69
—disagree	55
—neither	32
—agree	30
—strongly agree	22
So many: So many other people vote in local council elections that it's not important whether I vote or not	
—strongly disagree	74
—disagree	44
—neither	16
—agree	10
—strongly agree	8

Correlations with:	TLG	TGE	TCTY	TDIST	T83
Broken promises	- 11	- 11	- 12	- 11	- 9
Votes decide	16	10	17	16	11
Complex	- 29	- 26	- 29	- 33	- 18
So many	- 44	- 35	- 41	- 39	- 25

TABLE 3.13

All respondents

The relationship between turnout and local mobilisation/constraint factors III: attitudes to local government autonomy

	turnout (TLG)				
	%				
Best deal: Should council try to get best deal for area or should it leave this to local MP?					
—leave to MP					46
—council action					45
Appoint: Good or bad idea for central government to appoint local councillors?					
—very bad idea					50
—fairly bad					39
—neither					28
—fairly good					33
—very good idea					51
Actual central control: How much control do you think the local councils here have over the levels of local rates and services?					
—councils complete control					47
—councils more than govt					42
—shared equally					44
—govt more than councils					44
—govt complete control					53
Want central control: Should local councils be controlled more (or less) by central government?					
—lot less					51
—little less					43
—same					43
—little more					40
—lot more					56
Perc marg: Perceived marginality of local council (how likely to change control at next election?)					
—not at all likely					56
—not very likely					45
—fairly likely					44
—very likely					57
Correlations with:	TLG	TGE	TCTY	TDIST	T83
Best deal	- 1	2	2	0	2
Appoint	- 10	- 16	- 11	- 9	- 5
Actual cent contr	3	6	4	2	- 4
Want cent contr	- 3	- 8	- 8	- 4	2
Perc marginality	- 4	- 9	2	3	4

opinion—both those who most strongly support local government autonomy and those who most strongly support central government control. That curvilinear pattern is more interpretable in terms of high turnout by strongly committed partisans (of both parties) and by those with a great deal of interest and involvement in politics than in terms of attitudes to autonomy. Despite reasonable wording, it would appear that these questions fail to penetrate the fog of partisanship and discover unbiased attitudes towards local government autonomy—if, of course, such attitudes exist outside the context of current events and political partisanship.

Last we have one measure of the perceived marginality of the local council; that is, whether it is likely to change party control after the next election. It is almost unrelated to turnout. We have no measures that correspond to marginality as defined by Fletcher and others who have worked with ward election results.⁴⁰ To get such measures we would need to wait until the height of an election campaign and then ask about perceived *ward* marginality.

Assessing the two-step, two-level model

These tables of percentages and correlations only look at the bivariate relations between particular influences and turnout. For an overview we need an analysis that is at once simpler and multivariate. We shall return to the causal model set out earlier in Figure 3.1 and work our way through it using multiple regression techniques. But first let us put specific survey-based variables against the concepts in the model. We use a simplified set of variables based upon those used in Tables 3.8 to 3.13. The main changes are as follows:

- (i) employment status is replaced by an unemployed/not unemployed dichotomy
- (ii) tenure is replaced by three dichotomies—house owner/not; council or housing association tenant/not; private tenant or other renter/not
- (iii) interest in and discussion of national politics are combined into a single measure of involvement with national politics
- (iv) interest in and discussion of local politics are combined into a single measure of involvement in local politics
- (v) knowledge of county and district names, councillors' names and councillors' parties are combined into a single measure of local knowledge
- (vi) satisfaction with county and district councils is combined in one measure
- (vii) a single measure of local government autonomy is formed by combining answers to questions on appointment of councillors, actual central control, desired central control, and whether local votes decide the way things are run
- (viii) a single measure of local news media use is based on morning and evening papers, radio and TV

⁴⁰ P Fletcher, "The results analysed" in L J Sharpe (ed), *Voting in Cities: the 1964 Borough Elections* (London: Macmillan, 1967).

Our model postulated that psychological involvement with national politics would depend upon (national) personal characteristics and (national) mobilisation factors. A multiple regression shows that all eight variables in these groups had independent effects on involvement. Collectively they explained 30% of the variation in involvement. The most powerful influences on psychological involvement ran from education and class (in line with the findings of Verba and his associates) and from strength of feeling on national issues and parties.

TABLE 3.14

All respondents

Regression weights predicting psychological involvement with national politics

predictor	weight
age	7
sex	- 11
umempl	13
educ	18
(middle) class	19
imp of nat issues	29
(strength of) party identification	16
read paper	10
RSQ =	30%

Note: Main entries in this and later regression tables are standardised regression weights (path coefficients) calculated by the stepwise regression procedure of SPSSX version 2.1. RSQ is the square of the multiple correlation coefficient, expressed as a percentage. It is often called the "percentage of variation explained by the regression" and is a useful summary of the overall predictive power of the set of predictors, taken as a whole. In principle it can range up to 100 per cent, but with survey data on individuals it is usually very much less than that.

Similarly, our model postulated that psychological involvement in local politics would depend upon local personal characteristics, local mobilisation factors, and national involvement. Multiple regressions show that only some of the variables in these groups had an independent influence on local involvement. We also tested for the influence of the personal characteristics in the non-local group. The regressions show that involvement in local politics is predictable (variance explained = 36%) mainly from involvement in national politics, rather than from local factors either personal or mobilising. Local knowledge is much less predictable (variance explained = 7%) from the variables in our model.

Perhaps we should draw attention to some of the variables which had no independent effect. Length of local residence did *not* affect local political interest and discussion, though it did affect local knowledge. Satisfaction with local councils affected neither. Nor did rate paying.

Turnout in national elections was not very predictable from our model though it was influenced by age and partisanship. (Variance explained = 14% for T83, and 9% for TGE). Psychological involvement with national politics influenced national voting intention TGE, but not reported general election turnout T83.

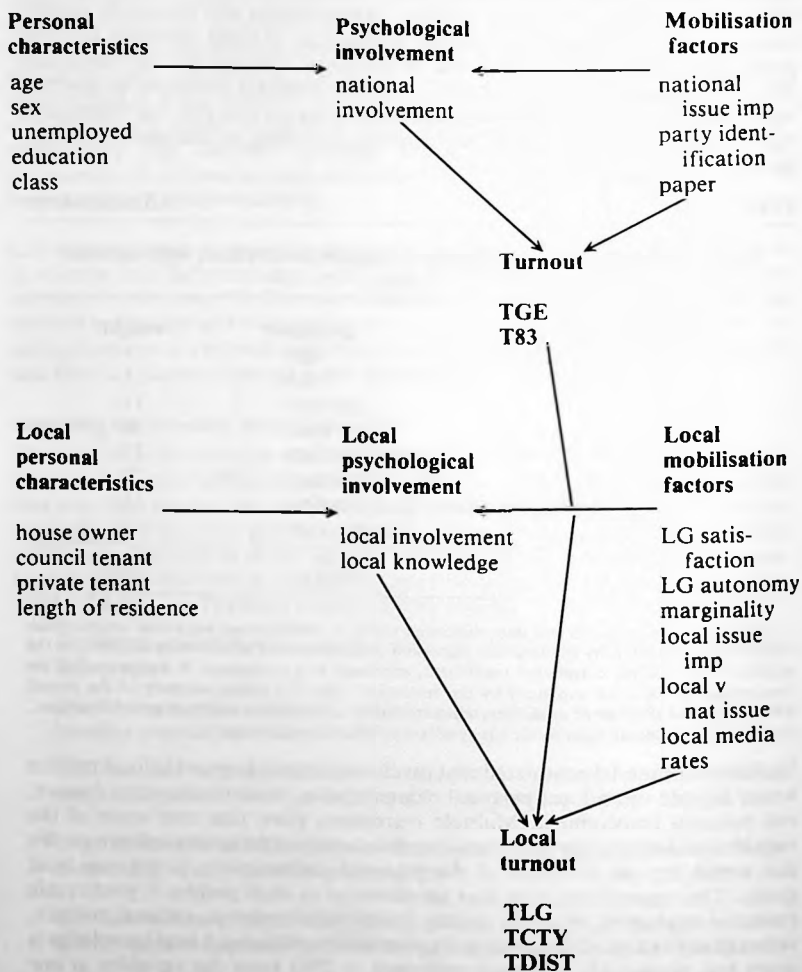


FIGURE 3.2

Survey variables in the two-level, two-step model of local election turnout

TABLE 3.15

All respondents

Regression weights predicting psychological involvement with local politics

predictors	dependent variables	
	local interest and discussion	local knowledge
	weight	weight
psych involvement with nat politics	56	13
length of local residence	0	15
age	14	—
(female) sex	11	—
LG autonomy	—	15
marginality	9	—
imp local issues	8	—
local media	15	—
RSQ = 36%		RSQ = 7%

Note: A dash indicates that the stepwise regression program rejected that variable as unhelpful for predictive purposes once the simultaneous effect of other predictors was taken into account.

Now we come to the final and most important part of the model: predicting local election turnout. Table 3.16 shows separately the three multiple regressions predicting TCTY, TDIST and TLG from all of the variables in the model. Because we use three different turnout variables the three regressions differ in detail. However some conclusions stand out. *First*, local election turnout is moderately predictable (variance explained = 24%, 22%, 44% with different turnout indicators). *Second*, psychological involvement in local politics, either in the shape of interest and discussion, or knowledge does influence local turnout. *Third*, specifically local *mobilization* factors are not very influential. *Fourth*, the most important personal factor is age, not a specifically local factor such as length of residence. *Fifth*, national mobilizing factors—the strength of party identification or more especially turnout in national elections, do influence local turnout, and are more powerful than local mobilising factors.

We can perform some “critical tests” by using more rigidly controlled regressions in which just two predictors are used to predict local turnout. Three pairs of predictors are interesting:

local interest/discussion *and* national interest/discussion

local interest/discussion *and* party identification

local interest/discussion *and* national turnout intention

Each multiple regression allows us to say which of the two predictors is more influential. The equations are:

$$\text{TLG} = 0.18 \text{ LOCINV} + 0.12 \text{ NATINV}$$

$$\text{TLG} = 0.20 \text{ LOCINV} + 0.22 \text{ PTY ID}$$

$$\text{TLG} = 0.15 \text{ LOCINV} + 0.59 \text{ TGE}$$

The first equation shows that psychological involvement in local politics has more influence than psychological involvement in national politics—but only by a margin of 3 to 2. And local involvement itself derives from national involvement.

The second equation shows that psychological involvement in local politics has about as much (slightly less in fact) influence as party identification.

The third equation shows that psychological involvement in local politics has much less influence than an intention to turnout in national elections—by a margin of 4 to 1.

Local turnout is therefore largely derivative from general or national propensities towards turnout though influenced to a lesser extent by psychological involvement in local politics and, to a still lesser extent by age.

DOES TURNOUT MATTER?

Previous studies

Does it matter who votes? Paradoxically, but perhaps only superficially, the problem is to some extent its own solution. Where class polarisation in politics is weak, working class parties do not exist to mobilise working class electors into voting. But by definition politics in these places is not about class and so the under-representation of working class people in voter turnout does not matter as much as it would elsewhere.

Wolfinger and Rosenstone found that differential turnout in America biased the vote 4% in favour of the Republicans. But there was no bias in terms of liberal v. conservative ideology—none, for example, on social welfare policy. So despite the enormous *socio-economic bias* in American turnout they concluded that the *political bias* was relatively small: “as long as attitudes on issues are so weakly related to social class and race, the poor and minorities will find enough allies to avoid political weakness in proportion to their own voting rates”.⁴¹

This is a comforting conclusion, but raises the deeper question of whether socio-economic turnout biases affect the whole structure of political competition. It is difficult for the Democrats to articulate strong support for the poor as long as the poor stay away from the polling stations; and they will stay away as long as there is no major party committed to mobilising their vote. So there may be a vicious circle linking social and political bias.

Verba and Nie's study of community voting in America reached a less complacent conclusion.⁴² By comparing the political priorities of elected officials

⁴¹ R E Wolfinger and S J Rosenstone, (1980) *Who Votes?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 111.

⁴² S Verba and N H Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

TABLE 3.16

All respondents

Regression weights predicting local turnout reports (TCTY and TDIST)
and intentions (TLG)

concept group	predictor variables	dependent variables		
		TCTY (county) weight	TDIST (dist) weight	TLG (intention) weight
Local involvement	local interest and discussion	9	13	11
	local knowledge	17	11	4
Local mobilisation factors	LG satisfaction	—	—	9
	LG autonomy	6	—	5
	marginality	—	—	—
	imp local issue	—	10	—
	local v natl issue	—	—	—
	local news media	6	—	—
	rate paying	—	—	—
Local personal	house owner	—	—	—
	council tenant	—	—	6
	private renter	—	—	—
	length of residence	4	16	—
National turnout	(1983) T83	10	29	—
	(intention) TGE	14	—	53
Other national mobilisation factors	imp natl issues	—	—	—
	strength of party	12	—	11
	identification	—	—	—
	read paper	—	—	—
National personal	age	17	13	10
	sex	—	—	—
	unempl	—	—	—
	educ	—	—	—
	class	—	—	—
		(R = 24%) (R = 23%) (R = 44%)		

	cumulative percent of variation explained when predicting:		
	TCTY	TDIST	TLG
By predictors:			
Local involvement	11	8	8
+ Local mobilisation	13	9	11
+ Local personal	14	13	12
+ National turnout	19	22	41
+ Other national mobilisation	20	22	43
+ National personal	24	23	44

with those of their electorates in 64 communities around the nation they found a close agreement between officials and electorates where participation was high, less agreement where it was low, and least agreement where participation was moderate. At intermediate levels of participation activists were numerous enough to influence the elected officials, but not numerous enough to be representative of the whole electorate. Happily, for our present concerns, this perverse effect of medium participation levels did not apply to voting turnout, but only to other forms of participation in which activists could convey more clearly articulated demands. For voting, but not for other forms of participation, there was a simple relationship: a higher level of turnout produced a greater concurrence of public and official attitudes.

At one time writers on American elections, and on British local government elections tried to make a virtue of necessity by arguing that "moderate participation levels are helpful in maintaining a balance between consensus and cleavage in society", or that elites had internalised democratic values more fully than the masses, or that high turnouts might be destabilising.⁴³ It is certainly true that a very high turnout may be a symptom of crisis and cleavage, though not necessarily the cause. But it is difficult to make a virtue of turnouts as low as 30 to 40%. It is a poor guarantee of stability, for example, when election results can be overturned so easily by differential turnout rather than attitude change. Low turnout is not necessarily a threat to the political system and it need not represent massive alienation, but it is not much of a defence either.

Some new findings on turnout bias

To say that age influences turnout rates is also to say that turnout is biased in terms of age. These are different ways of looking at the same phenomenon. Turnout correlates fairly well with age, so voters over-represent middle-aged and older electors—even more in local elections than in national elections, since the correlation between age and turnout is higher for local elections. But turnout is only slightly correlated with sex, education, class, house tenure and rate paying. So the bias with respect to these variables is minimal.

⁴³ See L W Milbrath, *Political Participation* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965) on the United States. On British local government see W H Morris-Jones, "In defence of apathy", *Political Studies* 2 (1954); or J A Griffiths, *From Policy to Administration* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976).

Turnout correlates fairly well with the *strength* of party identification but not with the *direction* of party identification. So the partisan bias in turnout is also minimal. Similarly on issues, the bias is negligible—either in terms of issue priorities or in terms of voters' positions on the important issue of taxes versus services.

Despite the fact that only 45% of respondents said they certainly would vote in a local election, and despite a very large bias against the young, local government voters are almost perfectly representative of the full electorate in terms of partisanship and issue attitudes. These relationships are shown in Tables 3.17, 3.18 and 3.19.

TABLE 3.17

All respondents

The relationship between turnout bias and social characteristics

Age profile of various groups of electors

	all electors	those who certainly would vote in a local election	those who certainly would vote in a parliamentary general election
Young	32	19	25
Middle-aged	35	37	37
Old	34	44	38
	100%	100%	100%

Class profile of various groups of electors

	all electors	those who certainly would vote in a local election	those who certainly would vote in a parliamentary general election
AB (upper middle)	18	20	21
C1 (lower middle)	23	23	23
C2 (upper working)	26	24	24
D (lower working)	15	14	14
E (dependents)	18	18	18
	100%	100%	100%

Tenure profile of various groups of electors

	all electors	those who certainly would vote in a local election	those who certainly would vote in a parliamentary general election
own	67	63	65
rent from council	26	28	26
rent from hs ass	4	5	4
rent privately	4	4	4
	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 3.18

All respondents

The relationship between turnout bias and party support

Party identification profile of various groups of electors

	all electors	those who certainly would vote in a local election	those who certainly would vote in a parliamentary general election
Con ident	35	36	36
Lab ident	45	44	45
Lib/SDP ident	20	20	20
	100%	100%	100%

National party preference profile of various groups of electors

	all electors	those who certainly would vote in a local election	those who certainly would vote in a parliamentary general election
Con pref	34	35	36
Lab pref	45	46	46
Lib/SDP pref	20	19	18
	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 3.19

All respondents

The relationship between turnout bias and issue attitudes

Issue priority profile of various groups of electors

	all electors	those who certainly would vote in a local election	those who certainly would vote in a parliamentary general election
Feel strongly about:			
no issue	48	41	41
unemployment	17	20	20
education	6	6	6
crime	5	7	7
NHS	4	3	2
other	20	23	24
	100%	100%	100%

Issue position profile of various groups of electors

	all electors	those who certainly would vote in a local election	those who certainly would vote in a parliamentary general election
Cut spending a lot and cut taxes	34	33	31
Cut spending a little and keep taxes	37	36	37
Keep spending and raise taxes a little	21	23	23
Increase spending and raise taxes a lot	8	7	9
	100%	100%	100%

CHAPTER 4

VOTING CHOICE AT LOCAL ELECTIONS

EVIDENCE THAT LOCAL ELECTION RESULTS ARE DETERMINED BY NATIONAL RATHER THAN LOCAL FACTORS

Until quite recently, doubts about the existence of effective local government policy autonomy have been accompanied by the conviction that local government elections are a judgement on central rather than local government.

National and local trends

A *Times* editorial described local elections as a "kind of large but primitive public opinion poll on the popularity of the (Central) Government of the day".¹ Newton described them as "a sort of annual General Election" and added that the term "Local Election... is something of a misnomer for there is very little that is local about them and they tell us practically nothing about the preferences and attitudes of citizens to purely local issues and events".² Gyford notes that this traditional view of British local government elections has been prevalent since local government elections were introduced in the early nineteenth century and it is still probably the dominant view.³ A recent issue of the *Economist* notes "academic evidence suggests that local factors have little influence on local elections".⁴ Fletcher noted the "close conformity of local election behaviour to national political trends".⁵ Gregory, Johnson, NOP, Schofield and Gyford have all pointed to what Schofield called the "nationalisation of local politics".⁶

Because there was a snap general election in 1979, local and central government elections took place simultaneously (in much of England and Wales). Waller tabulates and compares the voting figures constituency by constituency.⁷ In the boroughs especially, the fit between party shares of the local and national votes is very close. Indeed the BBC and ITN used this close fit in order to construct 1979 base-line voting figures for the new Parliamentary constituencies introduced in 1983.⁸

Alexander notes that "because of the mid-term unpopularity of (Central) governments, local elections invariably show major swings against the party in power nationally".⁹ He quotes the pro-Labour swing in 1973, the pro-

¹ The *Times*, Leading Article 5 May 1980.

² K Newton, *Second City Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 16.

³ J Gyford, *Local Politics in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), p. 128.

⁴ *Economist* "Local Government" 16 March 1985 pp. 38-40.

⁵ P Fletcher, "The results analysed" in L J Sharpe (ed), *Voting in Cities: the 1964 Borough Elections* (London: Macmillan, 1967).

⁶ R Gregory, "Local elections and the rule of anticipated reactions", *Political Studies* 17 (1969) 31-47; R W Johnson, "The nationalisation of English rural politics, Norfolk Southwest 1945-70", *Parliamentary Affairs* 26 (1972) 8-55; NOP, "GLC Elections", *National Opinion Polls Bulletin* April 1973; M I Schofield, "The nationalisation of local politics", *New Society* 28 April 1977; J Gyford, "Political parties and central local relations" in G Jones (ed), *New Approaches to the Study of Central-Local Government Relationships* (Farnborough: Gower Press, 1980).

⁷ R Waller, "The 1979 local and general elections in England and Wales: is there a local/national differential?", *Political Studies* 28 (1980) 443-50.

⁸ *BBC/ITN Guide to the New Parliamentary Constituencies* (Chichester: Parliamentary Research Services, 1983).

⁹ A Alexander, *The Politics of Local Government in the United Kingdom* (London: Longman, 1982).

Conservative swing in 1977 and emphasises particularly the pro-Labour swing in the 1981 local elections "at a time when the party was in considerable internal disarray". In his view that confirms the 1981 local elections as a reaction against central government rather than as evidence of a successful Labour campaign on local issues. Similarly, Byrne claims that throughout the period 1965-1979 local elections just prior to central government elections clearly forecast the Parliamentary result.¹⁰ Following Newton¹¹, he also charts the year by year swings in post-war local elections in Birmingham against the swings in national opinion polls. Judged visually, the fit is extremely close.

Events of the early 1980s confirm Byrne in his view that there is a close relationship between national and local trends. He points to a surge of SDP/Liberal Alliance support in the 1981 local elections which reflected the Alliance's entry into central government politics. The next year, the "Falklands factor" was as apparent in the local government elections as in the national opinion polls about central government performance. Many of the trends and divergences in local election results (Scotland and the north versus the south, for example) foreshadowed similar divergencies in the Parliamentary general election and could thus be described as nationally-oriented in terms of politics even if local in their geographical impact.

A lot of these studies have been impressionistic or, at the least, imprecise. Gregory for example, presents a table which gives the percentage Labour vote in the annual local elections in Reading 1945-1967 and the party's Gallup poll rating in April and May of the corresponding years.¹² He draws attention to the tendency for the two series to vary together and calculates a "statistically significant" correlation of 0.63. However "statistically significant" only means that it is unlikely that the correlation is zero. And a correlation of 0.63 means that less than 40 per cent ($0.63 \times 0.63 \times 100\%$) of the variation in Reading votes can be explained by variation in Gallup poll ratings. (Correlations between variables based on aggregates are frequently high, unlike correlations based on survey data. The reasons for this are simple and technical. Thus a correlation of 0.63, which would be very impressive if derived from survey data on individuals, is not so impressive when derived from aggregate borough results).

The existence of a nationwide trend does not preclude local trends and variations. The question of local versus national influences is not necessarily an either/or question; it can be both/and. National trends only explain a *proportion* of the variation in actual results.

Green used a more sophisticated statistical technique but unfortunately he, like Gregory and like Newton, restricted his analysis to a small area—this time Sheffield and Leeds.¹³ Using principal component analysis on the ward election results from 1951 to 1966 he concluded that 73% of the variation in party

¹⁰ T Byrne, *Local Government in Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).

¹¹ K Newton, *Second City Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹² R Gregory, "Local elections and the rule of anticipated reactions", *Political Studies* 17 (1969) 31-47.

¹³ G Green, "National, city and ward components of local voting", *Policy and Politics* 1 (1972) 45-54.

support could be attributed to "national factors", 6% to "city-wide" factors and 21% to more local factors. However it should be noted that Green's "national factor" was simply what Sheffield and Leeds had in common which may or may not have been truly "national".

Butler and Stokes, in their series of national election surveys, asked about local election voting in 1963 and 1969. Their findings have been interpreted as supporting the "nationalised" view of local government elections. They wrote: "One of the clearest evidences for the generalised nature of partisan dispositions in Britain comes from local government elections. In 1963 those who went to the polls in local elections that were fought on a party basis voted to an overwhelming degree *in line with their expressed party self-image (party identification)*... well over 90% of our respondents stayed with their generalized tie to the national parties, though local elections might be thought to be fought on entirely special local issues. This dominant role of a more general partisan tie is entirely consistent with the evidence our sample gave of their lack of involvement in local issues. When we asked those who voted in the May 1963 elections whether there were any issues that had especially concerned them, four out of five said "no" without hesitation; the remainder mentioned matters that were in fact more often the concern of Westminster than of the Town Hall".¹⁴

Perhaps the one caveat that should be mentioned is that party identification relates to *generalised* party attachment, not necessarily to specifically *national* party attachment, and it might have reflected local government influences to some degree.

The impact of rates

Newton prepared a short report for the Layfield Committee on "the impact of rates on local elections".¹⁵ In his view "the evidence, though not extensive, clearly indicates that rate changes have had a negligible effect on local (election) results".

Only three studies had used any quantity of reliable statistical data to examine the relationship between rate changes and local election results. Hinckley had compared Coventry's variation from the average rate change and the average electoral swing over the period 1949-64.¹⁶ He found *no* significant correlation. Newton himself had repeated the exercise for Birmingham over the period 1949-71 and again found no significant correlation.¹⁷ Alt had analysed 44 county boroughs over the years 1958-1968 and found no correlation between competitiveness (ie marginality) and rate levels: "if rate increases are a sensitive issue one might have expected to find lower rates in the consistently more competitive boroughs but this does not appear to be the case".¹⁸

¹⁴ D Butler and D Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 40-1.

¹⁵ K Newton, "The impact of rates on local elections" in *Local Government Finance: Report of the Committee of Inquiry*, Cmnd 6453, Appendix 6, 98-101 (London: HMSO, 1976).

¹⁶ D Hinckley, "Factors influencing Local Government Elections" in P Spencer (ed), *The Political Structure of Local Government in Coventry* (Coventry: Institute for Operational Research, 1966).

¹⁷ K Newton, *Second City Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹⁸ J Alt, "Some Social and political correlates of county borough expenditures", *British Journal of Political Science* 1 (1971) 49-62, p. 54.

Case studies suggested that rates had seldom been a major debating point in local politics.¹⁹ Sample surveys had shown that few electors knew much about their local rate levels, or mentioned rates as an important local election issue, or contacted their local council members about any matter connected with rates, though Councillors themselves were unwilling to discount the effects of rate increases on their own or their party's electoral prospects.²⁰

However Newton concluded his report to the Layfield Committee by warning that local government was moving into a new era. In the decades prior to his report, rate increases had been small and had been matched or exceeded by increases in real income. He warned that large rate increases might produce an electoral response.

EVIDENCE THAT LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICY MAY AFFECT LOCAL ELECTION RESULTS

Local influences

Newton may simply have missed or disregarded some of the contrary evidence. Gregory had noted that in 1957 an unusually sharp rise in the rates in Labour-controlled Reading coincided with a 3% drop in Labour's share of the local vote, at a time when national Gallup polls were showing a 3% rise and Labour was gaining many seats in other local elections.²¹ Budge *et al* had shown that, in Glasgow, rates was the one issue on which electors claimed (and had!) accurate knowledge of the issue-positions of their ward councillors.²² Rees and Hampton had detected some local factors at work in local elections.²³

But in any case, as Newton himself had warned, his report to the Layfield Committee was written when national and local political conditions were changing. Since then Brown *et al*, Redcliffe-Maud and Wood, Ferry, Waller, and Bristow amongst others, have pointed to the effects of *local issues*.²⁴ Moreover, the influence of *local organisation* and *local campaigning* on turnout, which we discussed

¹⁹ F Bealey, J Blondel and W P McCann, *Constituency Politics: A Study of Newcastle-under-Lyme* (London: Faber, 1965); A H Birch *et al*, *Small Town Politics: A Study of Political Life in Glossop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959); J G Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government* (London: Longmans, 1967); J Dearlove, *The Politics of Policy in Local Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); W Hampton, *Democracy and Community: A Study of Politics in Sheffield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); G W Jones, *Borough Politics: A Study of the Wolverhampton Borough Council 1888-1964* (London: Macmillan, 1969); L J Sharpe, *A Metropolis Votes* (London: London School of Economics, 1962); L J Sharpe (ed), *Voting in Cities: the 1964 Borough Elections* (London: Macmillan, 1967).

²⁰ F Bealey, J Blondel and W P McCann, *Constituency Politics: A Study of Newcastle-under-Lyme* (London: Faber, 1965); W Hampton, *Democracy and Community: A Study of Politics in Sheffield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); *Report of Committee on the Management of Local Government. Vol. 3: The Local Government Elector* by Mary Horton (London: HMSO for Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1967).

²¹ R Gregory, "Local elections and the rule of anticipated reactions", *Political Studies* 17 (1969) 31-47, p. 45.

²² I Budge, J A Brand, M Margolis and A L M Smith, *Political Stratification and Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 1972).

²³ A Rees, "West Hartlepool" in L J Sharpe (ed), *Voting in Cities: the 1964 Borough Elections* (London: Macmillan, 1967); W Hampton, *Democracy and Community: A Study of Politics in Sheffield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

²⁴ T Brown, M J C Vile and M F Whitmore, "Community Studies and Decision Taking", *British Journal of Political Science* 2 (1972) 133-53; Lord Redcliffe-Maud and B Wood, *English Local Government Reformed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); J Ferry, "Rates and elections", *Centre for Environmental Studies Review* 5 (1979) 5-7; R Waller, "The 1979 local and general elections in England and Wales: is there a local/national differential?", *Political Studies* 28 (1980) 443-50; S L Bristow, "Rates and votes—the 1980 District council elections", *Policy and Politics* 10 (1982) 163-80.

earlier, is relevant to party choice insofar as turnout effects operate differentially to the advantage of one party or another. Local *influences* need not be synonymous with local *issues*. They include much more.

Increasing political volatility in opinion polls and by-elections had been noticed in the late sixties. By 1974 increased political volatility was also evident in general elections and the SSRC's sequence of election surveys had detected a dramatic fall in the number of electors willing to describe themselves as strongly committed to a political party. Class divisions also declined sharply in the 1970s as middle and working class people became much closer in their voting choices. In short, people became less committed, less constrained and more volatile in their voting behaviour. Thus the *potential* for a split between national political choices and local election voting increased.

The rates revolt of the 1970s

At the same time Britain entered an era of hyperinflation and rates no longer increased by small amounts. So rates increases became more visible and more likely to provoke controversy. Writers on local government had frequently noted the relatively high visibility and unpopularity of rates compared to other taxes.²⁵

Newton quoted his own survey of Birmingham councillors to suggest that even though there was no evidence of public reaction against rates increases in the 1950s and 1960s, councillors felt that rates rises could adversely affect them.²⁶ Gregory entitled his paper the "rule of anticipated reactions" because he too, found that "local issues and local controversies exerted very little influence on the municipal election results in Reading since the war" but local councillors "overestimate their own salience in the eyes of the electorate" and "try to anticipate popular reactions".²⁷ Bruce and Lee now dispute Gregory's conclusions but their own 1978 data show that only half the councillors in Manchester, Salford and Stockport thought that national factors alone determined the outcome of their local elections (though these councillors attributed more impact to *local candidates* rather than *local issues*).²⁸

Cowan found indirect evidence that councillors believe that rate decisions influence election results.²⁹ In 1978 the average rate increase in the 44 authorities with elections that year was less than half the average rate increase in the 252 authorities with no elections that year. Ferry did a longitudinal analysis of county and borough rates from 1950 to 1974.³⁰ In the counties, for example, "in each election year we see a reduced rate of increase, followed in the succeeding year by a steeper one, which restores the rate call to its longer-term trend".

²⁵ See for example, J Stanyer, *Understanding Local Government* (London: Fontana, 1976); P G Richards, *The Reformed Local Government System* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980); B Keith-Lucas and P G Richards, *A History of Local Government in the Twentieth Century* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978).

²⁶ K Newton, "The impact of rates on local elections" in *Local Government Finance: Report of the Committee of Inquiry*, Cmd 6453, Appendix 6, 98-101 (London: HMSO, 1976).

²⁷ R Gregory, "Local elections and the rule of anticipated reactions", *Political Studies* 17 (1969) 31-47.

²⁸ A Bruce and G Lee, "Local election campaigns", *Political Studies* 30 (1982) 247-61.

²⁹ M Cowan, "The old election-year phobia—but do the rates matter?", *Municipal Journal* June 1978, p. 562.

³⁰ J Ferry, "Politics and the rates", *Centre for Environmental Studies Review* 4 (1978) 57.

There is an accumulation of evidence to suggest that these councillors were right to fear the possibility of reactions against unusually visible rates increases. Nugent, and King and Nugent discuss the so-called "ratepayers revolts" of the mid-seventies in Tyne and Wear, and in Wakefield.³¹ Like Grant³² and Dowse and Hughes,³³ King and Nugent find that "sporadic interventionists", new to politics, go swiftly from initial enthusiasm and euphoria to disillusion and apathy. The Ratepayers organisations that flourished in 1975 when ratepayers faced dramatic increases, had lost most of their support by 1978. As direct influences on local politics they were "relatively ineffective" and to maintain their existence they slowly transformed into environmental pressure groups concerned with pavements, speed limits, the quality of local life (and the value of houses!) rather than rates. However Nugent claimed that they did have a significant effect upon the "general climate of political opinion". Local politicians became more cost-conscious, grandiose building plans were abandoned, and national government increased its grants to local authorities in order to keep rates down. Politically, ratepayers groups operated through demonstrations, petitions and well-publicised questionnaires to major-party candidates, as well as by fielding candidates of their own. So the influence of these ratepayer groups is difficult to measure and certainly goes far beyond the election of Ratepayers Association candidates.

The potential for a rates revolt was also shown when the Labour-controlled Coventry City Council held an "advisory" referendum in which it asked voters whether they preferred higher rates or reduced services. In the summer of 1981 the Secretary of State for the Environment introduced a bill to require local authorities to hold a referendum before exceeding central government's spending guidelines. In the event the bill was dropped but while it was under consideration, Coventry held a voluntary referendum. On a 25% turnout the voters opposed further increases in the rates by a margin of seven-to-one.³⁴ Questions about public expenditure are notoriously sensitive to question wording however. A more detailed set of questions put by MORI (Market and Opinion International) to a sample of Coventry electors in the week before the referendum showed that although there was broad support for general expenditure cuts there was massive opposition to cuts in education and social services which together totalled 79% of Coventry's budget.³⁵ So it would be wrong to assume that the low-rates low-expenditure reflex would always prove reliable.

In an analysis of the London borough elections of 1978, Ferry finds that "rates do seem to have influenced the results of those elections, at least in recent years".³⁶ For the 18 Labour councils especially there was a close correlation

³¹ See R King and N Nugent, "Ratepayers associations in Newcastle and Wakefield" in J Garrard, D Jary, M Goldsmith and A Oldfield (eds), *The Middle Class in Politics* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1978); and N Nugent, "The ratepayers" in King and Nugent (eds), *Respectable Rebels: Middle-Class Campaigns in Britain in the 1970s* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979). For another, generally less useful study of local government elections in the mid-seventies, see D M Clarke, *Battle for the Counties* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Redrose, 1977).

³² W Grant, *Independent Local Politics in England and Wales* (London: Saxon House, 1978).

³³ R E Dowse and J A Hughes, "Sporadic interventionists", *Political Studies* 25 (1977) 84-92.

³⁴ A Alexander, *The Politics of Local Government in the United Kingdom* (London: Longman, 1982).

³⁵ C Game, "Budget-making by opinion poll—must services always suffer?", *Local Government Studies* 8 (1982) 11-18.

³⁶ J Ferry, "Rates and elections", *Centre for Environmental Studies Review* 5 (1979) 5-7.

between that year's rate change and the number of seats won or lost. Wandsworth, Hammersmith and Hillingdon increased rates sharply and lost seats heavily. Brent, Waltham Forest and Newham held their rates steady and actually increased Labour's share of seats. Two years later the Wolverhampton result in the 1980 metropolitan district elections was regarded as something of a test case. In Wolverhampton Labour raised the domestic rate by 56% yet actually gained two seats. However that gain in seats reflected some accidental factors in particular wards and the overall swing in Wolverhampton votes since 1979 was 4% *against* Labour in contrast to substantial pro-Labour swings in nearby Coventry, Sandwell and Walsall.³⁷

Bristow presents a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between rates increases and election outcomes at the 1980 elections.³⁸ As part of its public expenditure reduction programme, central government refused to increase Rate Support Grant in line with inflation; so most local authorities had to raise rates or cut services. On average they raised rates by 22%. Labour councils averaged a rates rise of 23% and Conservative councils 21%; so there was very little correlation between party control and rates rises.³⁹ In its analysis of these results the *Economist* claimed that "it is hard to detect much difference between results in areas run by high-spending Labour councils from those in Tory ones; though there does appear to have been a lower (pro-Labour) swing in some extreme cases of profligacy (eg Newcastle, with the highest rate poundage in the country). And just a hint of a lower swing to Labour in richer (high ratepaying) wards, while the poorer wards voted Labour for public services".⁴⁰ Bristow reanalyses these results in terms of rates *increases* rather than rates *levels* but comes to the same conclusion. Indeed, because the swing to Labour was stronger in already Labour areas (which increased rates somewhat more) the slight correlation between pro-Labour swings and rates increases was positive ($r = + 0.17$). However Labour did suffer an adverse swing in Liverpool and Wolverhampton in both of which rates had increased by over 50%.

Bristow also analyses the Wolverhampton result in some detail, using ward level votes and census data, plus a sample survey of 249 voters in the Oxley ward. Labour increased its support in the poorer, working class wards and lost support in the more affluent, middle class wards. The Oxley ward vote split 43% Conservative, 30% Labour and 22% Ratepayer. Obviously the results of the sample survey represent Oxley rather than Wolverhampton as a whole, still less the nation as a whole. However they do show a striking awareness of the local rates issue.

When asked what was the *most important issue* in the election, three quarters cited the rates increase—92% of Ratepayer voters and 87% of Conservative voters cited the rates issue, though only 40% of Labour voters did so. By comparison, Bruce and Lee found that only 14% of respondents to their survey of Manchester, Salford and Stockport in 1978 listed rates as an important issue.⁴¹

³⁷ C Game, "Local elections", *Local Government Studies* 7 (1981) 63–8.

³⁸ S L Bristow, "Rates and votes—the 1980 District council elections", *Policy and Politics* 10 (1982) 163–80.

³⁹ S L Bristow, "Rates and votes—the 1980 District council elections", *Policy and Politics* 10 (1982) 163–80, p. 164.

⁴⁰ *Economist* "Swing Low" 10 May 1980 p. 44.

⁴¹ A Bruce and G Lee, "Local election campaigns", *Political Studies* 30 (1982) 247–61.

Knowledge of the size of the rates increase was also high in Wolverhampton, however. When asked whether it was closest to a 10%, 25%, 50%, or a 100% rise, 89% of Conservatives, 86% of Ratepayers and even 70% of Labour voters picked the correct answer. Overall 84% of those who cited rates as the most important issue were also able to specify the correct size of the increase.

Bristow concludes that "it could not be maintained that the electors were unaware of the issue before them". "The Wolverhampton evidence confirms the importance to local politics of local campaigns on issues directly relevant to the locality". He attributes the swing against Labour in Wolverhampton, which ran against the national trend, to the "salience of the peculiarly high rate increase (which) benefitted the Conservative party at a time when it was suffering setbacks elsewhere".

Adverse swings, however, do not automatically penalise a party under our first-past-the-post system.⁴² The Conservatives not only enjoyed a favourable swing, they won 48% of the Wolverhampton vote as against Labour's 41%. But the Labour Party still took a majority of the seats on the council. In part at least this was because the pro-Conservative swing was accompanied by a class polarisation of the vote: the Conservatives piled up extra votes in their already safe middle class strongholds and did not win extra seats.

Wherever an issue polarises classes or other residential groupings, it is likely to have a large effect on individuals but a small effect upon the number of seats won. Moreover, although this does not apply to a marginal borough like Wolverhampton, even a large effect upon council seats may not affect party control of the council because some areas are so socially homogeneous that Labour is unlikely ever to win them (if homogeneously middle class) or lose them (if homogeneously working class). One party on the council has an effectively permanent majority.⁴³

However parties may be sensitive to variations in the size of their majority. Certainly individual councillors are unlikely to welcome losing their seats, whether or not the party majority on the council survives.

In 1982 an outstanding feature of the local election results in Scotland was the so-called "Lothian effect".⁴⁴ Turnout increased in Lothian, whereas it decreased in Scotland as a whole. Secondly the SDP/Liberal Alliance recorded an above average share of the vote in Lothian, and the Conservatives recorded a below average decline. So Labour suffered a setback in Lothian while making advances elsewhere. Lothian had imposed a large rates increase, but perhaps more important it had engaged in a highly publicised fight with the Secretary of State for Scotland about levels of expenditure and rates.⁴⁵ Unlike Labour in Wolverhampton, Labour in Lothian lost control of the region as a result of the

⁴² V Bogdanor, "Why the local election system makes us appear more divided", *The Times* 19 May 1980; V Bogdanor, "It's time to end town hall caucus rule", *The Guardian* 17 November 1980.

⁴³ See J G Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government* (London: Longmans, 1967), for a development of this argument.

⁴⁴ J M Bochel and D T Denver, *Scottish Regional Elections 1982* (Dundee: University of Dundee, 1982).

⁴⁵ A Midwinter, M Keating and P Taylor, "Excessive and unreasonable: the politics of the Scottish hit list", *Political Studies* 31 (1983) 394-417.

1982 election. However it must be said that if the Secretary of State had conducted an equally successful fight against the Strathclyde Regional Council because of an excessive rates increase, the Labour majority was so large that it would have been diminished but not overturned. (In fact the Secretary of State did not regard the Strathclyde increase as unreasonable and did not penalise or criticise it).

National Opinion Polls have reported a number of special local election surveys.⁴⁶ In the 1982 London Boroughs survey they asked: "why will you vote for (chosen party)?" Most respondents gave fairly general answers like "they've got the best policies". Only 3% of all voters (7% of Conservatives however) spontaneously mentioned "keeping the rates down". But when asked about the "important issues in deciding your vote" local issues were much more prominent: 56% mentioned *only local issues*. Twenty seven per cent mentioned *both* local and national, while 13% mentioned *national* issues exclusively. The most frequently mentioned single issue was *rates*, mentioned by 35% of all voters. These findings flagrantly contradict the findings of Butler and Stokes on local issue salience which were quoted earlier. The difference probably reflects both methodological differences and a change in the political context since the sixties.

In 1984, NOP put local government questions to a nationwide sample. *Rates* were "not at the front of many people's minds" in the sense that when asked for "any particular complaints?" about the local council, half said they had none, and only 6% spontaneously mentioned rates (though 10% did so in Labour-controlled areas).⁴⁷ However, when asked "*how concerned* are you about the level of rates in your area?" fifty per cent said "very concerned"—46% in Conservative-controlled areas and 57% in Labour-controlled areas. When asked whether "over the last four years do you think the increase in local rates has been *reasonable or unreasonable*?" twelve per cent did not know, while the rest divided right down the middle—44% opted for "reasonable" and 44% for "unreasonable". There was little difference between Conservative and Labour partisans, but a large difference between those who lived in Labour and Conservative-controlled areas—34% said "reasonable" in Labour-controlled areas, while 50% said "reasonable" in Conservative-controlled areas.

By a narrow majority of 47% to 43%, respondents rejected the idea that central government should stay out of local financial affairs; and by a much larger majority of 58% to 34% they approved *statutory rate-capping*. On both these questions there was a huge difference of opinion (presumably motivated by party identification) between Labour and Conservative partisans. By 2 to 1, Conservatives approved central government intervention, while by a similar 2 to 1 margin, Labour partisans rejected central government intervention. Alliance supporters were equally divided between support and opposition.

Rates were the most prominent local issue in the 1970s. But local issues include more than rates, and local influences on voting include more than local issues—local candidates, local party organisation and campaigning, local scandals, are all likely to have an impact on the result without being "issues" in the strict

⁴⁶ NOP, "GLC Elections" *National Opinion Polls Bulletin* April 1973; NOP, "London Borough Elections" *Political Social Economic Review* 37 (1982) 5–10; NOP, "Local Government" *Political Social Economic Review* 47 (1984) 7–12.

⁴⁷ NOP, "Local Government" *Political Social Economic Review* 47 (1984) 7–12, p. 8.

sense. Bruce and Lee's survey in Manchester, Salford and Stockport asked respondents what would be the major issues in their minds when they decided how to vote in the 1978 local election. The top four items mentioned by respondents were (in order): partisan loyalty, housing, rates, education. The local candidate, the performance of national government, inflation, and law and order tied for fifth place. Only a tenth of respondents failed to name some concern, those that were named most frequently were clearly not restricted to national politics, and the local concerns were not restricted to the rates.

NATIONAL TRENDS AND LOCAL VARIATIONS

Once again a comparison with studies of American Congressional voting is illuminating. In the last decade or so, American academics have begun intensive, survey-based studies of Congressional (as opposed to Presidential) voting. An excellent summary of the relevant literature is given by Gary Jacobson.⁴⁸ There is a paradox to Congressional voting patterns that may be of some relevance to our understanding of British local government elections. Just as the traditional assumption about British local government elections has been that they reflect central government popularity and local issues are unimportant, so in the United States the traditional assumption about Congressional Elections was that they reflected the personal and party popularity of the incumbent President. Just as the Westminster governing party loses ground at mid-term local elections, so the President's party typically loses ground at mid-term Congressional elections. Tufte showed that the voting in Congressional elections was strongly and systematically related to simple measures of the economy and presidential popularity.⁴⁹

Unfortunately, direct survey studies of Congressional voting show that the voters in Congressional elections focus very strongly on local concerns rather than national, on the local Congressman and his challenger rather than on the President. And they split their tickets to an increasing degree; so that individuals and even districts do *not* vote the same way for both President and Congressman.

Here is the paradox: direct survey evidence shows that voters in Congressional elections vote largely on their knowledge and evaluation of the particular pair of candidates in the locality yet in aggregate their votes appear to follow clear and easily predicatable national trends. Jacobson solves the puzzle by arguing that potentially strong challengers are so influenced by their belief in national trends that they are reluctant to fight Congressional elections for the President's party when the President is unpopular. This "party-morale" or "candidate-morale" effect then affects the Congressional election outcome. Jacobson supports his argument with a wealth of statistical data and analysis.

It is highly unlikely that British voters in a local government election are anywhere near as locally-oriented as American voters in a Congressional election, despite the fact that British local government is a local institution and the American Congress is a national institution. However the American paradox does make it clear that national uniformities and trends in the aggregate of local

⁴⁸ G C Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (Boston: Little Brown, 1983).

⁴⁹ E R Tufte, *Political Control of the Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

election results may conceal a substantial degree of locally-oriented motivations. Party morale, if not challenger-morale, may well vary with the popularity of central government and, given the known effect of canvassing and campaigning in low-turnout elections, may have a substantial effect on outcomes. What we cannot do, is infer motivations from aggregate patterns and trends. And if we do not understand motivations we cannot understand the true constraints and dynamics of local election voting.

Simultaneous local and central government elections in 1979 provide some evidence of split-ticket voting. While split-ticket voting seems to have been limited in urban areas, in the more rural areas it was substantial, both between local and central voting and between local candidates on the same party ticket: "it was not unusual for a candidate to poll over twice the vote of a ward running mate".⁵⁰ There was an almost invariable tendency for Liberals to poll better in the local contests than in the Parliamentary election. In Liverpool the Liberals won 28% of the local government vote but only 14% of the central government vote. While Liverpool was an extreme case, in many other places the Liberal vote was significantly higher in the local election than in the Parliamentary. Cox and Laver present an intensive analysis of the difference between local and national results in Liverpool.⁵¹

Jones and Stewart describe as a fallacy the notion that local government elections are solely determined by the popularity of national government.⁵² They accept that national government popularity has a "dominant effect upon local elections" but maintain that local factors have additional effects, overlaid on the national trends. Many analyses of local elections, in their view, detect only national factors simply because they only look for national factors. "Forms of explanation (that stress) north-south divides or the level of unemployment" or the "Falklands factor" are valid and do reveal genuine national influences but they suppress, by averaging out, the variety of local effects that are also operating: "Because analysis is directed at finding uniformities, local variation goes unrecorded. But since the mid-1970s local factors increasingly influence the results". Nationally-oriented media commentators only recognise this development when complaining about "unevenness" in the results. Jones and Stewart ask why Tameside swung to Labour against the tide in 1978, why the Liberals consistently do better in local than in national contests, why Labour made gains at the 1982 elections in Wolverhampton, Barnsley, Oldham and Strathclyde, but lost ground at the same time in nearby areas like Walsall, Bradford, Leeds, Rochdale and Lothian. "The salutary lesson is that local elections can matter and that the actions of a local authority can affect the election even when a Falklands factor is at work."

However, Jones and Stewart rightly warn against substituting one nationally-oriented explanation for another: it is clearly not the case that the public everywhere reacted simply to left-wing or right-wing politics or policies. Some left-wing councils did much better than others in the elections either because the electorate was reacting to non-policy characteristics like style, presentation, or

⁵⁰ R Waller, "The 1979 local and general elections in England and Wales: is there a local/national differential?", *Political Studies* 28 (1980) 443-50.

⁵¹ W H Cox and M Laver, "Local and national voting in Britain", *Parliamentary Affairs* 32 (1979) 383-93.

⁵² G Jones and J Stewart, *The Case for Local Government* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983).

personality, or because different electorates wished to make different policy choices. Thus Jones and Stewart document the variations in electoral response without presenting any data on the electors' motivations.⁵³ Similarly Laver attributes the Liberals' local government strength in Liverpool to their representation of a particular social group—the residents in ageing, poor quality, private housing rather than to specific policy reactions.⁵⁴

In summary therefore:

- (i) There is a lot of variation round and about the overall national trend which reflects different local influences in different localities. The national trend in the aggregate of local government election results only emerges when these local variations are suppressed by a process of "averaging out".
- (ii) As the American Congressional studies show, a national trend in the aggregate can be consistent with almost exclusively local orientations amongst the voters—however paradoxical that sounds on first hearing.
- (iii) The so-called national trend may be in part a public response to what is perceived to be happening in local governments up and down the land. In the early 1980s Ken Livingstone was probably much better known than most shadow cabinet members—both inside London and outside London. Those who cannot name the deputy leader of the Labour Party may well be able to name the deputy leader of Liverpool Council.
- (iv) Rates rises are only likely to be salient when they are unusually high—that is higher than in the past or higher than in other places. And the generally established finding that people vote according to their conception of the public interest rather than their own immediate pocket-book interest means that local government voters' reactions to rates increases are first, likely to be affected by media debates and second, may be a response to rates increases in places other than their own locality, or to increases in the rates levied by a different level of local government in the same locality. One local authority's image may be affected by another local authority's performance.
- (v) Although voters will generally choose a cut in services rather than a rise in rates, when they are confronted with specific cuts in the big-spending services then they tend to favour the maintenance of those services.
- (vi) But it would be totally wrong to equate local variations in local government election results with reactions to rates policy or even with reactions to local government policy outputs generally. Variations in style and presentation, variations in local media coverage, variations in the personal qualities of candidates or the campaigning efficiency of organisations can all affect the result. Scandals and corruption amongst councillors, especially if they become public just prior to an election may have a large but non-policy based impact.

⁵³ G Jones and J Stewart, *The Case for Local Government* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983). See also G Jones, "Varieties of local politics" *Local Government Studies* April 1975; G Jones and J Stewart, "The local factor in a local election", *Local Government Chronicle* 18 June, 1982.

⁵⁴ M Laver, "Are the Liverpool Liberals really different? A path analytic interpretation of local voting in Liverpool 1973–82", *British Journal of Political Science* 14 (1984) 243–8.

A MODEL OF LOCAL ELECTION VOTING CHOICE

Before we go on to look at the evidence in the NOP survey it will be helpful to sketch out a model which gives an overview of the factors influencing voters' choices in local elections.

Overview of the model

The literature suggests that local election choice will to a large extent reflect underlying partisanship or current reactions to the (central) government of the day.⁵⁵

But overlaid on these national influences and trends will be other, local influences—some reflecting local policy outputs, some reflecting local policy debates, some reflecting the influence of local personalities, local scandals, local organisation.⁵⁶ As Britain has emerged from the period of hyperinflation the visibility and impact of rates rises are likely to be less significant now than a decade ago.

Diagrammatically this model has the simple form shown in Figure 4.1.

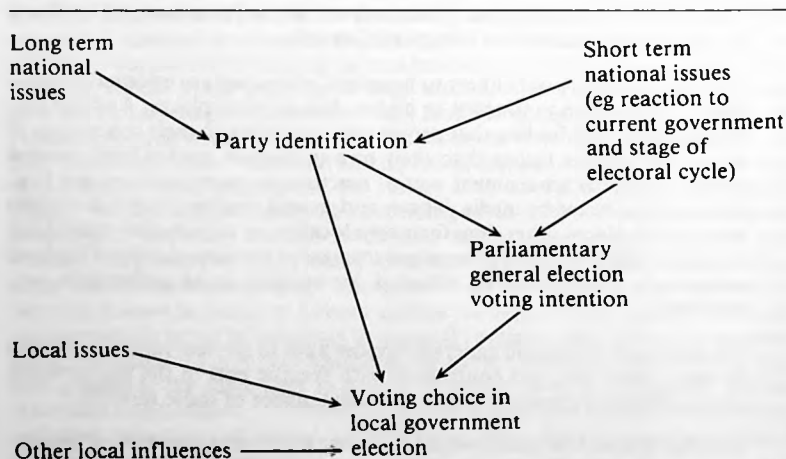


FIGURE 4.1

Structure of a simple model of local election voting choice

⁵⁵ On the first point see the references already made to D Butler and D Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1974); and on the second, see the references made to T Byrne, *Local Government in Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).

⁵⁶ See the references made earlier to G Jones and J Stewart, *The Case for Local Government* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983).

In this model, party identification is influenced by both long and short term national influences; national voting preferences reflect both party identification and short term reactions; local voting choices reflect national influences from party identification, national voting intention and short-term reactions to (central) government; but local voting choices also reflect local influences. Although this model has a relatively simple form, it would be extremely difficult to test it by incorporating specific measures of local influences. We should need measures of the policy outputs of each particular local authority, measures of the visibility and popularity of thousands of local politicians, and measures of media coverage (primarily *local* media coverage) of the special issues in each particular locality. The NOP survey cannot provide these requirements.

Fortunately we can test the model in a much easier way by looking at the influence of the national factors in the model. If, for example, local electors vote entirely in accordance with their national party identification then we hardly need any measures of local factors which might influence local voting choice since there would be no scope for them to exert influence. By quantifying the extent of national influence on local election choice, we do at least set limits to the possible influence of local factors.

When we looked at turnout patterns in local elections we used a number of survey based measures of local interest and concern to predict turnout rates. And some did indeed seem to encourage higher turnout. We can incorporate similar measures into our analysis of local voting choice. However, they enter the model in a more complex fashion, as *interactive* rather than *additive* influences. We do not suppose that local concerns will influence voters towards or against particular parties throughout the nation. Instead, we postulate that those voters with more local concerns will be more willing to cast local election votes which are *out of line with their national party identification* and *out of line with their national voting preference*.

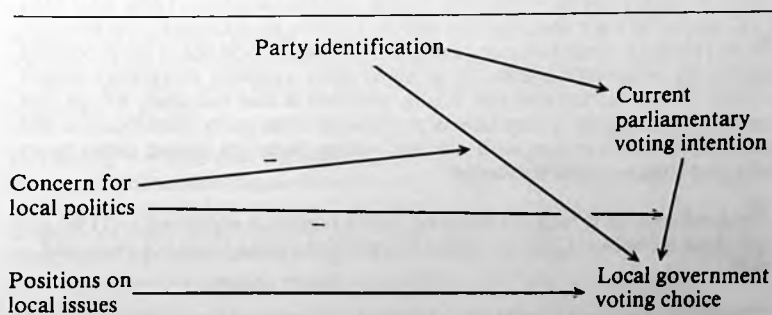


FIGURE 4.2

The structure of the interactive model of local election voting choice

So the effect of a concern for local politics could not be represented in the model by an arrow pointing towards voting choice. Instead it could be represented by an arrow pointing at other arrows, *since it affects relationships not variables*.

Diagrammatically, therefore, our final model of local voting choice has a structure like that in Figure 4.2. The greater the concern for local politics, the weaker the influence of national factors on local election choices.

NEW FINDINGS ON VOTING CHOICE IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

This model can be investigated by regression methods similar to those used in the study of turnout patterns, but some care is needed in defining the partisanship and voting variables. Unlike turnout, which has only one dimension, voting and partisanship are at least three way choices. We can define two variables which capture the dimensions of that three way choice. *First* we define a Labour versus Conservative choice LABCON, scoring respondents who choose Labour as plus 1, those who choose Conservative as minus 1, and all others as zero. *Second* we define an Alliance versus the rest choice ALLIANCE, scoring respondents who choose the Liberal/SDP Alliance as plus 1, and all others as zero. This scoring system can be applied to party identification, voting preference in a Parliamentary general election held "tomorrow", and voting preference in a local government election held "tomorrow".

As other possible influences on local election voting choice we include TAX, based upon whether respondents want *tax cuts* or service cuts; BLAME, based upon whether respondents *blame local councils* or central government for cash shortages in local government; RVR, based upon whether respondents indicate a *concern with rates* or a concern with rents as local issues—those who mention neither or both are treated as neutral on this variable; and finally, OWN which is based on whether respondents are *house owners* rather than council or housing association tenants. Together these variables represent all the non-interactive variables in our model.

The multiple regression results, using these variables to predict local election voting choice are shown in the table. When only the variables, TAX, BLAME, RVR, and OWN are used they do appear to have an influence—particularly OWN. However, when national party identification is included in the predictive scheme the independent influence of these other variables disappears almost entirely. When current national voting intention is also included, we see that local voting intention is very largely predictable from party identification and national voting intention, with national voting intention having rather more influence than party identification.

The predictive fit is high for Alliance voting (variance explained = 71%) and very high indeed for Labour versus Conservative voting (variance explained = 90%).

Nonetheless we might hypothesise that the domination of national factors might be less extreme in some subsets of the electorate—though the findings for the electorate as a whole imply that national politics *cannot* be a *very weak* influence on local voting in a *very large* subset of the electorate.

TABLE 4.1

All respondents

Multiple regression analyses of local government voting intention

Dependent variable: LABCON(LG)				Dependent variable: ALLIANCE(LG)			
Predictors:				Predictors:			
Tax	- 9	..	1	Tax	..	..	..
Blame	- 12	..	1	Blame	..	..	..
RVR	- 11	- 2	- 2	RVR	..	..	..
Own	- 36	- 2	..	Own	11	3	1
LABCON (ID)	92	38		ALLIANCE (ID)	78	35	
LABCON (GE)		57		ALLIANCE (GE)		53	
	(RSQ = 90%)				(RSQ = 71%)		

Note: Entries are standardised regression weights (path coefficients) as before. The three columns show regressions first of all without partisan predictors, then with party identification, and finally with national voting intention as predictors. The RSQ figures for percentage of variation explained refer to the regressions in the third columns, using partisan predictors as well as issue and social predictors. Periods indicate variables rejected as having no predictive power, once the simultaneous effect of other predictors is taken into account.

Several interactive variables were tried. Two particularly useful ones are:

- (i) the *strength* of party identification; and
- (ii) respondents' answers to the question: "if you are voting in a local council election, are you influenced more by *local issues* or more by *national issues*".

As Table 4.2 shows, party identification and national voting preference have a very large effect upon local election choice in *all* subsets of the electorate but there are some systematic variations. Their influence is weaker (though not weak!) amongst those whose sense of party identification is weak, and amongst those who claim to vote primarily on local issues. But perhaps it is more surprising that national political affiliation has *so much* effect on the local voting choices of those who claim their party identification is *weak* (variance explained = 86%) and their local election votes are determined by *local issues* (variance explained = 87%).

In passing, we note that the local Labour v Conservative election choices of strong party identifiers depend more on party identification than national voting preference; while the reverse is true for those with weak party identification. The *strength* of party identification determines which *aspect* of national political preferences has most influence upon local choice, but *the collective dominance of national factors remains almost unaltered by strength of partisanship*.

Another way of viewing the correlation of national and local voting choice is to tabulate choice at one level against choice at the other. In some respects this is a simpler form of analysis, but one that will allow some subtle investigation, and expose some of the ambiguities hidden in the regression analysis.

TABLE 4.2

Various subgroups of electors

Multiple regression analyses of local government voting intentions within various subgroups of the electorate

Sub- groups:	Dependent variables											
	LABCON (LG)						ALLIANCE (LG)					
	all resp	pty id		nat iss	vote on:		all resp	pty id		nat iss	vote on:	
		str	wk		both	local iss		str	wk		both	local iss
Predictors												
Tax	1	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	-6	..	..
Blame	1	1	..	-1	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
RVR	-2	-2	..	..	..	-2	..	..	..	..	..	..
Own	..	-1	1	-2	2	1	1	2	..	..	..	..
Party ID	38	52	26	30	44	36	35	38	32	45	43	29
GE PREF	57	44	69	67	52	58	53	51	54	47	54	55
RSQ =	90%	91%	86%	96%	89%	87%	71%	74%	64%	81%	79%	65%

Note: In this section "strong identifiers" are those with a "very strong" or "fairly strong" sense of identification; while "weak identifiers" are those with a "not very strong", "don't know" or "no" party identification.

First, if we restrict attention to those electors who have a Conservative, Labour or Alliance national party choice and a Conservative, Labour or Alliance local voting intention, then we can confirm Butler and Stokes finding that over 90% of local election voters act in accord with their national political choice.⁵⁷ The table (below) shows that this is true whether national choice is defined in terms of party identification or general election vote preference. Moreover, it is true even for those who claim that they vote in local elections on *local issues* rather than *national issues*. And it is very close to being true also for those who claim that in local elections they vote for the *candidate*, not the *party*. (In local council voting, 54% claim they vote on local issues, 22% on national issues; 13% take both into account and 11% don't know. Again in local elections 32% claim to vote for the candidate and 52% for the party—which contrasts with Parliamentary general elections in which only 11% claim to vote for the candidate and 79% for the party).

In particular, that third of the electorate who claim they vote for the candidate in local elections remind us of President Truman's answer to the question of whether he himself voted for the man or the party: 'I always vote for the best man: he is the Democrat'. Fully 88% of local government voters who claim to vote for the man nonetheless intend to vote in accord with their national party identification!

TABLE 4.3 Respondents with
Conservative, Labour or Alliance choices
at both national and local levels

Per cent voting in accord with national party choice I: Conservative, Labour and Alliance voters only

	Percent of local voters with local preferences in accord with their (national) PTY ID	(national) GE PREF
amongst:		
all respondents	92	93
party identification		
strong	95	95
weak	86	90
claim local voting on basis of:		
national issues	96	97
both	94	95
local issues	90	91
claim local voting:		
for party	94	95
for candidate	88	89

⁵⁷ D Butler and D Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

Table 4.3 matches the Butler/Stokes finding and the regression analyses presented above. However, it neglects the fact that many local election voters do not identify with the Conservatives, Labour or the Alliance; or they do not vote for these parties; or they neither identify with them nor vote for them (Table 4.4). The dominance of national political choice is considerably less if we take account of the people to whom it cannot apply.

TABLE 4.4 All respondents with a local election preference

Per cent voting in accord with national party choice II: All voters with local election preferences

Percent of all electors with local preferences whose local preferences are:					
	in accord with GE pref	in accord with PTY ID	contra- dicting PTY ID*	C/L/A ID but prefer "other" locally	do not have C/L/A ID
amongst:					
all resps	83	79	7	5	10
party ident:					
strong	85	87	5	6	3
weak	78	61	11	5	24
claim local voting on basis of:					
national issues	92	90	3	1	5
both	91	83	5	1	10
local issues	77	71	9	9	10
claim local voting:					
for party	89	87	6	2	5
for man	69	64	9	13	14

* Contradiction is defined as choosing one of Conservative, Labour or Alliance nationally and another of the three locally.

Restricting now our attention to those who express a local election voting preference—but imposing no additional restrictions—we find that only 79% express a local choice for Conservative, Labour or the Alliance which is in accord with their party identification (Table 4.5). This figure falls to 71% amongst those who claim to vote on local issues; to 61% amongst those with weak party identification; and to 64% amongst those who claim to vote for the man in local elections. There is a slightly closer correspondence between local choices and current national party preference: but still only 83% have a local choice in accord with their national choice and this figure drops to 78% amongst weak identifiers, 77% amongst those who claim to vote on local issues, and right down to 69% amongst those who claim to vote for the man. Relatively few people have a local

election choice which *flagrantly contradicts* their party identification or current national choice—around 7% of all respondents and not much more amongst those who claim to vote on local issues or vote for the man. But two or three times as many either *choose* “other” local candidates or *have no national party identification*, or *both*.

TABLE 4.5

Respondents with voting choices
in the appropriate elections

Per cent of all those with voting choices whose choices are in accordance with their party identification

Type of choice:	Percent of all electors with voting choices in accordance with party identification				
	LG pref	CTY vote	DIST vote	GE pref	1983 vote
amongst: all respondents	79	80	79	83	81
party identification:					
strong	87	87	85	91	88
weak	61	64	63	67	67
local voting on basis of:					
national issues	90	88	92	89	88
both	83	92	91	86	86
local issues	71	74	71	81	78
local voting:					
for party	87	90	89	87	86
for man	64	67	61	77	75

Note: Many respondents who claim to vote for the man in local elections, claim to vote for the party in national elections.

This analysis can be repeated to show how far each of the five voting choice variables in the survey accords with party identification. Those who claim to vote in local elections *on local issues*, or *for the man* show less accord with their party identification not only in local voting, past and future, but also in national voting. Nonetheless the effect is more marked (as it should be) for local voting. The percentages with voting choice in accordance with their party identification are less amongst those who stress local rather than national issues:

- 10% (11%) less for 1983 General Election choices
- 8% (10%) less for current national voting choice
- 14% (23%) less for county voting
- 21% (28%) less for district voting
- 19% (23%) less for current local voting choice.

(The figures in brackets show by how much less those who stress the local “candidate” rather than the “party” have voting choices in accordance with their party identification).

Clearly, when people claim to vote on local issues or for the man in local elections they are telling us something about their behaviour in national as well as local elections. Indeed they may be telling us something about the influence of partisanship on *all* their voting choices. But there is also a very clear difference of scale between the effect of this local concern on local and national choice.

Given that the percentages voting in accordance with party identification are very much less than 100%, *in what way* do local choices differ from national choices? The detailed tabulation of local vote preference by party identification and by national vote preference in Table 4.6 shows:

- (i) *no* switching from Labour or Conservative national choice to the opposite local choice
- (ii) switching between parties involves the Alliance, and the *Alliance gains* more than it loses in local preferences (compared either to national identifications or current national vote choice)
- (iii) roughly equal percentages switching from each national party choice to a local voting preference for "*other*" candidates.

TABLE 4.6

All respondents with
a local election preference

Local choice by national choice I: All voters with local election preferences		Party identification			
Percentages of all those with a local preference who have specified choice combinations		Con	Alliance	Lab	Oth,DK,None
LG	Conservative	27	1	0	2
VOTE	Alliance	2	15	2	2
PREF	Labour	0	1	37	2
	Other	2	2	2	3
Parliamentary general election vote preference		Con	Alliance	Lab	Oth,DK,WNV undecided
LG	Conservative	28	1	0	1
VOTE	Alliance	2	17	2	1
PREF	Labour	0	1	39	2
	Other	2	2	2	3

Note: Within each of the two parts of this table percentages sum to 100%, except for rounding error.

To see the effect of a concern with local issues we can tabulate local election choice by party identification separately for those who claim to vote on national issues (in local elections) and those who claim to vote on local issues; for those who claim to vote for the party and for those who claim to vote for the man. Amongst the nationally-oriented the correspondence between local choice and

national party identification is extremely close. Amongst the locally-oriented the pattern resembles that in the whole sample, but is intensified: larger numbers of Labour and Conservative identifiers have a local preference for the Alliance; and larger numbers of all three parties' identifiers have a local preference for "other" candidates. Comparing the locally-oriented to the nationally-oriented on issues, the locally-oriented are:

- (i) three per cent more likely to identify with the Alliance

and

- (ii) seven per cent more likely to vote for it in local elections since higher switching rates to the Alliance cumulate with higher Alliance identification

- (iii) four per cent more likely to have no party identification

and

- (iv) nine per cent more likely to vote for "other" candidates in local elections, because of higher switching rates to "others".

Comparing those who vote "for the man" with those who vote "for the party" (in local elections), the locally-oriented are:

- (i) two per cent *less* likely to identify with the Alliance

but

- (ii) five per cent *more* likely to vote for it

- (iii) eight per cent more likely to have no party identification

and

- (iv) thirteen per cent more likely to vote for "other" candidates.

This survey of local election choices suggests that:

- (i) local election choice is very strongly determined by party identification

and

- (ii) it is even more strongly determined by current national voting preferences

so

- (iii) national choice factors, of one kind or another, dominate local election choice

however

- (iv) there is some slippage between national and local choice because some electors do not have a national choice

and

- (v) because voters are more willing to vote for Alliance and "other" candidates in local elections

TABLE 4.7

Various subgroups of respondents
with a local election preference**Local choice by national choice II: various subgroups of voters with local election preferences**Percentages of those in the subgroup with a
local preference who have specified choice
combinations

			Party identification			
			Con	Alliance	Lab	Oth,DK,none
Amongst those who vote in local elections on <i>national</i> issues	LG	Con	34	0	0	3
	VOTE	Alliance	1	15	1	0
	PREF	Lab	0	1	40	1
		Other	0	1	0	1

			Party identification			
			Con	Alliance	Lab	Oth,DK,none
Amongst those who vote in local elections on <i>local</i> issues	LG	Con	24	1	0	2
	VOTE	Alliance	3	15	3	3
	PREF	Lab	0	1	34	2
		Oth	3	3	3	3

Percentages of those in the subgroup with a local
preference who have specified choice combinations

			Party identification			
			Con	Alliance	Lab	Oth,DK,none
Amongst those who vote for party in local elections	LG	Con	30	1	0	1
	VOTE	Alliance	1	16	2	1
	PREF	Lab	0	1	41	2
		Oth	0	2	0	2

			Party identification			
			Con	Alliance	Lab	Oth,DK,none
Amongst those who vote for candidate in local elections	LG	Con	23	1	0	3
	VOTE	Alliance	3	14	3	5
	PREF	Lab	1	0	27	2
		Oth	5	3	5	4

Note: Within each of the four parts of this table percentages sum to 100%, except for rounding error.

but

(vi) over four fifths of local voters vote exactly in accord with their national party identification or current national preference for the Conservatives, Labour or the Alliance

and

(vii) even amongst that half of the electorate who claim to vote in local elections *on local issues*, between two thirds and three quarters vote exactly in accord with their national Conservative, Labour or Alliance identification

and

(viii) even amongst that third of the electorate who claim to vote for the *candidate rather than the party* in local elections (if not in national) almost two thirds vote exactly in accord with their national Conservative, Labour or Alliance identification.

Even if we accept that some voting, and especially some survey responses about voting, are likely to be random and ultimately inexplicable, these findings suggest that there is *some* scope for the impact of local influences on local voting. Roughly a tenth of local voters do not have a national party identification and another tenth vote out of accord with their national party identification. By no means all of these voters will be responding coherently to local influences, but *some may*, especially since the number of these "non-national-party" voters varies somewhat with the attention paid to local issues or local candidates.

Overall therefore the findings support the Jones and Stewart claim that there are local variations around a nationally determined norm.³⁸ The local variations, on this survey evidence, are relatively small however, and they principally involve local choice by those without a national choice, or defections to local Alliance and "other" candidates by those whose national choice lies with the major parties.

The principal causes of variations in local swings of support between Labour and Conservative must either be differential losses to Alliance and "other" candidates or differential turnout. Once Labour and Conservative partisans get to the polling station they do not switch to the opposite party even in local elections. In earlier sections we saw that differential turnout by Labour and Conservative partisans was so slight as to produce no voting bias in the local elections throughout the nation. However that does not preclude it having strong effects in different directions in different localities.

One important caveat must be emphasised. The Committee's survey was a national survey carried out in December. That is far removed from the time (late April, early May) when local elections loom large in people's thoughts.

It is perfectly possible that local issues may become more important, and national partisanship less important, at particular times and in particular places.

³⁸ G Jones and J Stewart, *The Case for Local Government* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983).

We might expect local factors to be more influential

- (i) at local election times, when (and if) the election inspires more media coverage and more public debate about local issues
- (ii) during periods of crisis, such as periods of hyperinflation which increase the visibility of local taxation
- (iii) in places of crisis, where unusual action by a particular local authority or an unusual response by central government focuses public attention on that local authority's behaviour.

In general it would be misleading to emphasise deviant cases. A *virtue* of the NOP survey is that it is national in scope and does not give undue weight to a few places that are in the news. But it is probably *not a virtue* of the survey, that it took place so far away in time from a local election atmosphere.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Following our analysis of the correlates of turnout, an appropriate model for turnout in local elections can be set out diagrammatically as in figure 5.1. The bold lines indicate stronger causal links; broken lines indicate weaker links.

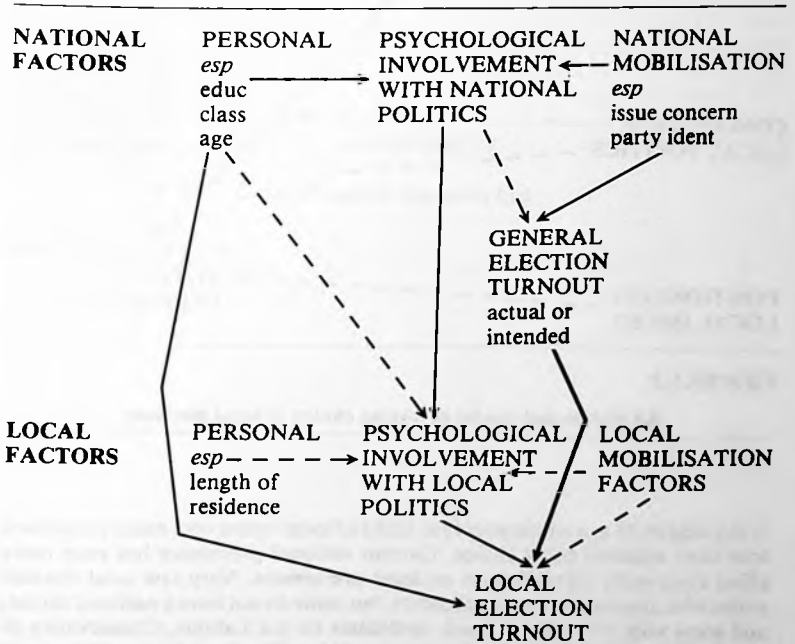


FIGURE 5.1

An elaborated model of turnout in local elections

Local election turnout depends largely though not completely on national political factors. Local mobilisation factors have very weak effects. Psychological involvement with local politics has more effect but is itself dependent upon general involvement with (national) politics. Crude "critical tests" of the relative influence of local involvement compared to other factors suggest that it is somewhat more influential than national involvement, about as influential as national party identification, and much less influential than a firm intention to turn out in national elections.

Following our analysis of voting choice an appropriate model for voting choice at local elections can be set out as shown in Figure 5.2.

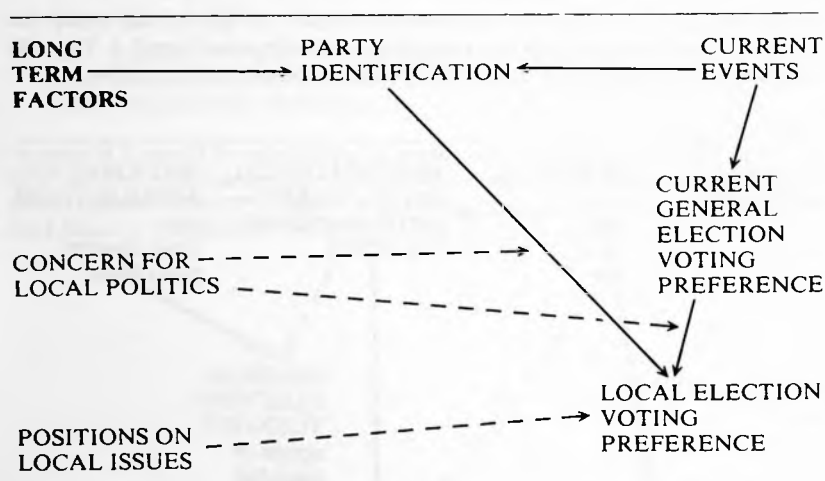


FIGURE 5.2

An elaborated model of voting choice at local elections

In the electorate as a whole over four fifths of local voters vote exactly in accord with their national party choice. Current national preference has even more effect than party identification on local preferences. Very few local election voters vote *against* their national choice, but some do not have a national choice, and some vote for "other" local candidates (ie not Labour, Conservative or Alliance) in local elections despite a national identification with one of the main parties. Even amongst those who claim to vote in local elections *on local issues* or *for the candidate not the party*, at least two thirds vote exactly in accord with national party identification and only one tenth vote directly against their national party identification.

So while there is a detectable element of local influence in local election choice it is not large. Variations in Conservative/Labour swing between different localities reflect variations in attitudes to national politics, or variations in partisan turnout, or variations in the attraction of Alliance or "other" candidates.

Finally, although differential partisan turnout may account for differences between localities, *in the nation as a whole* there is no partisan or issue bias due to low local election turnout. Local election voters are representative of the electorate in every respect except age.

3. APPENDICES

NOP Market Research Ltd

APPENDIX A

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

THE SAMPLE

The survey was based on a random sample in 112 sampling points. Scotland was oversampled by a factor of 3.33 in order to produce sufficient numbers there to permit separate analysis. The sampling points were selected from those used for NOP's Random Omnibus Survey. These are drawn from all constituencies in Great Britain (except Orkney and Shetland, and the Western Isles) by a process of multiple stratification. Region, urban/rural mix, and social class are the variables used in the stratification. In England and Wales a systematic half of the 163 sampling points was selected while in Scotland all 17 sampling points were selected, plus an additional 13. In each constituency a ward was selected and seventeen names drawn systematically from the register (21 names in the GLC area).

At each sampled address if there was anyone living there aged 18 or over who was *not* on the electoral register, a list was compiled of these non-electors and one of them selected for interview according to a random process. Thus in some cases two interviews could be conducted in the same household.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

An outline of topics to be covered in the questionnaire was supplied with the survey brief, and from this a draft version of the questionnaire was developed by NOP, Committee staff, and their research adviser. This questionnaire was then tested in a pilot survey of 24 interviews. Four interviewers worked on the survey, and each attended personal briefing and debriefing sessions.

Following the pilot a final version of the questionnaire was drawn up after a further round of discussions. This is to be found in Appendix B.

FIELDWORK

Interviewing began on November 23, and continued until December with 112 interviewers working on the survey—one in each sampling point.

At least four calls were made at each address before it was abandoned as a non-contact. Other than non-electors as discussed above, no substitutes were taken.

Ten per cent of all addresses were subject to field quality control checks, which revealed no more than minor levels of interviewer error.

In total 1144 interviews were conducted and this represents an overall contact rate of 63%. Details of the contact rate are shown below.

Electoral sample

Names issued	1935
'Deadwood'—vacant, died, etc	238
Effective sample	1697

Elector interviews	1027
Contact rate	61%
<i>Non-elector sample</i>	
Non-electors located	146
Non-electors interviewed	117
Contact rate	80%
<i>Overall sample</i>	
Available for interview	1814
Interviews	1144
Contact rate	63%

CODING AND ANALYSIS

Code frames were drawn up from the first 100 replies to each open-ended question, and after these were agreed with the Committee's research adviser, questionnaires were coded according to these codes. Copies of the code frames are attached.

Once coded, the questionnaires were sent for punching, and the cards then loaded onto the NOP computer. The data were subject to a series of checks for range and filter errors, serious missing data, and logical inconsistency.

Table specifications were drawn up by the Committee's research adviser and tabulations produced accordingly. All tables were based on weighted data, with two separate weights being used:

(a) *Non-elector weighting*

While all electors have an equal chance of being selected for interview, the same is not true of non-electors. A non-elector's chance of selection is higher if there are a lot of electors at the address, because this means the address itself has more chance of selection. However the non-elector's chance of selection is lower if there are a lot of non-electors at the address because only one non-elector is selected per address. To compensate for these differing probabilities, all non-electors receive a weight of:

$$\frac{\text{Number of non-electors at address}}{\text{Number of electors at address}}$$

(b) *Regional weighting*

As stated above, Scotland was oversampled in order to permit separate analysis. In the aggregate data this oversampling had to be corrected, and this was done by applying two target weights.

Scotland	9.45%
England & Wales	90.55%

APPENDIX B

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

WCP/5898

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Serial No (6-9)

Constituency
number:

(1) (10)

Name: _____

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Address: _____

Tel No: _____

(17)
Elector ----- 1 NUMBER OF ELECTORS
Non-Elector ----- 2 1 2 3 4 5 + (18)
Remember to count respondent
NUMBER OF NON-ELECTORS
0 1 2 3 4 5 + (19)
If 'None' code '0'

IF NON-CONTACT

Reason for non-contact

(20)
Refused ----- 1
Moved ----- 2
Dead ----- 3
Too ill ----- 4
On holiday/away ----- 5
House vacant/demolished -- 6
Not available after 4+
calls ----- 7
Other (WRITE IN AND RING) ----- 8

IF CONTACT

CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD (21)

Under 5 ----- 1
5-15 ----- 2
No children under 16 ----- 3

AGE (Write in exact age in
boxes below).

--	--

(22)(23)

SEX (24)

Male ----- 1
Female ----- 2

RESPONDENT IS (25)

Working full-time ----- 1
Working part time ----- 2
Unemployed ----- 3
Not working ----- 4

TENURE

Owned/being bought ----- (26)
Rented - council ----- 2
- housing assoc. --- 3
- private landlord --- 4
Other ----- 5

T.E.A.

(27)
14/15 ----- 1
16 ----- 2
17 ----- 3
18 ----- 4
19 or over ----- 5
Still in education ---- 6

ESTABLISH WHETHER HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD IS:

(28)
Working (full or part-time) ----- 1 ASK
Retired/not working with private pension/means ----- 2 OF
Unemployed under 2 months ----- 3 HOH
Unemployed 2 months or more ----- 4 ASK IF
Retired/not working with state pension only ----- 5 THERE IS A
CHIEF WAGE
EARNER.

ASK
OCCUPATION
(29) OF CHIEF
Yes ----- 1 WAGE EARNER
No ----- 2 CODE AS 'E'

OCCUPATION OF HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD/CWE

GROUP (30)

AB ----- 1
C1 ----- 2
C2 ----- 3
D ----- 4
E ----- 5

Interviewer Name: _____

Interviewer number: _____

Date: _____

Q1 How long have you lived in this area?

(31)
 Less than 1 year ----- 1
 1 year but less than 2 years ----- 2
 2 years but less than 5 years ----- 3
 5 years but less than 10 years ----- 4
 10 years or more ----- 5

(31)

Q2 Do you know the name of your *County/Regional* Council

(32)
 Correct ----- 1
 Incorrect (WRITE IN) _____

(32)

 _____ 2
 No, don't know ----- 3

(In fact it is....)

Q3 Do you know the name of your *city/district/borough* council?

(33)
 Correct ----- 1
 Incorrect (WRITE IN) _____

(33)

 _____ 2
 No, don't know ----- 3

(In fact it is)

Q4a On the whole do you think (county) council runs things very well, fairly well, or not at all well?

Q4b And on the whole do you think..... (local) council runs things very well, fairly well, or not at all well?

Q4a (34) Q4b (35)

Very well ----- 1 ----- 1
 Fairly well ----- 2 ----- 2
 Not at all well ----- 3 ----- 3
 Don't know ----- 4 ----- 4

(34
 /
 35)

- Q5 Some services in your area are provided by locally elected councils - that is.... (County) council and.... (local) council, and other services are provided by different bodies such as the central government and nationalised industries.

I am going to read out a list of services. For each one can you tell me if they are provided in your area by ... (county) council, by... (local) council, or by some other body.

	County Council	Local Council	Other	Don't Know	
Schools -----	1	2	3	4	(36)
Council housing -----	1	2	3	4	(37)
Hospitals -----	1	2	3	4	(38)
Street cleaning -----	1	2	3	4	(39)
Electricity supply -----	1	2	3	4	(40)
Home helps for the elderly ----	1	2	3	4	(41)
Rubbish collection -----	1	2	3	4	(42)
Unemployment benefit -----	1	2	3	4	(43)
Dealing with planning applications -----	1	2	3	4	(44)
The Fire Service -----	1	2	3	4	(45)

- Q6 SHOWCARD A For each of these services can you tell me how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the way they are provided in this area?

	Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Do not know	
Schools -----	1	2	3	4	5	6	(46)
Council Housing -----	1	2	3	4	5	6	(47)
Street cleaning -----	1	2	3	4	5	6	(48)
Home helps for the elderly. 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	(49)
Rubbish collection -----	1	2	3	4	5	6	(50)
Dealing with planning applications -----	1	2	3	4	5	6	(51)
The Fire Service -----	1	2	3	4	5	6	(52)

- Q7 Local councils often say they are short of money. Do you think this is mainly because of council overspending, or mainly because councils don't get enough help from the government?

	(53)
Council overspending ----	1
Not enough help -----	2
Both equally -----	3
Other -----	4
Don't know -----	5
	(53)

- Q8 SHOWCARD C People have different views on what local councils should or should not do. For each of these can you say if local councils should be required to do them, or should they be able to do them if they wish, or should they not be allowed to do them?

Have to do Allowed to do Not allowed Don't know

Maintain road surfaces -----	1	-----	2	-----	3	-----	4	(54)
Provide play groups for very young children -----	1	-----	2	-----	3	-----	4	(55)
Give grants to voluntary organisations -----	1	-----	2	-----	3	-----	4	(56)
Provide council housing -----	1	-----	2	-----	3	-----	4	(57)
Provide parks and open spaces.	1	-----	2	-----	3	-----	4	(58)
Spend money to create jobs in the area -----	1	-----	2	-----	3	-----	4	(59)

- Q9 Some people say that local councils should be involved in trying to get the best deal for the area from the government, while others say that should be left to the local MP. Which is closer to your own view?

	(60)	
Council involved -----	1	(60)
Left to MP -----	2	
Don't know -----	3	

- Q10 SHOWCARD D How good or bad an idea would it be for the people who run local government to be appointed by central government instead of being elected by local people?

	(61)	
Very good idea -----	1	
Fairly good idea -----	2	
Neither good nor bad -----	3	(61)
Fairly bad idea -----	4	
Very bad idea -----	5	
Don't know -----	6	

- Q11 SHOWCARD E How much control do you think the local councils here have over the levels of local rates and local services?

	(62)	
Almost completely controlled by councils ----	1	
Control shared, councils more say -----	2	
Control shared equally -----	3	(62)
Control shared, government more say -----	4	
Almost completely controlled by government --	5	
Don't know -----	6	

- Q12 Do you think local councils ought to be controlled by central government more, less, or about the same amount as now?

IF MORE ASK : Is that a lot more or a little more?
IF LESS ASK: Is that a lot less or a little less?

	(63)	
A lot more -----	1	
A little more -----	2	
About the same -----	3	(63)
A little less -----	4	
A lot less -----	5	
Don't know -----	6	

Q13a Is there any issue in politics, national or local that you feel strongly about? What is that? CODE ONE ONLY. IF MORE THAN ONE PROBE FOR ONE FELT MOST STRONGLY ABOUT.

	(64)	
No, none -----	1	GO TO Q14a
Yes - unemployment -----	2	
crime -----	3	
inflation -----	4	
rates -----	5	ASK Q13b
housing -----	6	
nuclear weapons -----	7	
roads/traffic/parking -----	8	
schools/education -----	9	
hospitals/health/NHS -----	0	
Other (WRITE IN) -----		
_____	X	

Q13b Is this problem mainly for local councils or mainly for central government to deal with.

	(65)	
Councils -----	1	ASK Q13c
Government -----	2	
Both equal -----	3	
Don't know -----	4	GO TO Q14a

Q13c SHOWCARD F How well or badly is the government/is the local council/are they tackling this problem?

	(66)	
Very well -----	1	
Fairly well -----	2	
Average -----	3	
Fairly badly -----	4	
Very badly -----	5	
Don't know -----	6	

ASK ALL

Q14a Do you know the name of (any of) the councillor(s) for your ward on (local council)?

	(67)	
Correct -----	1	
Wrong names -----	2	
No, don't know -----	3	

Q14b Do you know what party your local councillors are from?/councillor is from?

	(68)	
Correct -----	1	
Incorrect -----	2	
No, don't know -----	3	

Q15a What party is in control of ... (county council)?

Q15b And what party is in control of ... (local council)?

	Q15a (69)	Q15b (70)
Conservative -----	1	1
Labour -----	2	2
Alliance -----	3	3
Independent -----	4	4
No overall control -----	5	5
Don't know -----	6	6

(69
/ 70)

INTERVIEWER CODE UNLESS 'Don't know'

Correct -----	7
Incorrect -----	8

IF 'Don't know' at Q15b GO TO Q17a, ALL OTHERS ASK Q16.

Q16 How likely is it that a different party will win control of ... (local) council at the next local elections? READ OUT:

	(71)
Very likely -----	1
Fairly likely -----	2
Not very likely -----	3
or Not at all likely -----	4
(Don't know) -----	5

(71)

Q17a Have you ever wanted to complain about something (local) council has done or failed to do?

	(72)
Yes -----	1 ASK Q17b
No -----	2 GO TO Q22

(72)

Q17b What was it about? WRITE IN AND CODE

SUBJECT	(73) CONCERNED	(74)
Council Housing/Rents -----	1	Respondent & family only - 1
Rates -----	2	Other people as well ----- 2
Planning -----	3	
Education -----	4	
Street cleaning/Refuse -----	5	
Social services -----	6	
Roads/Traffic/Parking -----	7	
Vandalism -----	8	
Other -----	9	

(73
/ 74)

Q18 Did you actually complain?

	(75)
Yes -----	1 GO TO Q20
No -----	2 ASK Q19

(75)

Q19 Why did you not complain?

(76)
1 2 3 4
5 6 7 8
9 0 X Y

NOW GO TO Q22

NEW CARD
DUP COLS 1-5
② (10)

2 Who did you complain to? Any one else? ASK Q21 FOR EACH ONE
COMPLAINED TO.

SHOWCARD G How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the way ...
dealt with the matter?

Q20	Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	
Councillor ----- 1	2	3	4	5	6	(11)
Council officers -- 1	2	3	4	5	6	(12)
Own MP ----- 1	2	3	4	5	6	(13)
Minister/Govnt. -- 1	2	3	4	5	6	(14)
District Auditor -- 1	2	3	4	5	6	(15)
Ombudsman ----- 1	2	3	4	5	6	(16)
Newspaper/TV ----- 1	2	3	4	5	6	(17)
Other (WRITE IN) _____						
_____ 1	2	3	4	5	6	(18)
Can't remember ---- 1						(19)

INTERVIEWER CHECK Q20 Has respondent ever complained to councillor?

(20)

Yes ----- 1 GO TO FILTER BEFORE Q26

No ----- 2 ASK Q22

(20)

2 Have you ever contacted one of your councillors on (local council)
by visit, phone or letter?

(21)

Yes ----- 1 ASK Q23

No ----- 2 GO TO FILTER BEFORE
Q26

(21)

3 When did you last do this?

(22)

In the last month ----- 1
More than 1 month but less than 3 months ago ----- 2
More than 3 months but less than 6 months ago ----- 3
More than 6 months but less than 12 months ago --- 4
Over a year ago ----- 5

(22)

4 What did you contact the councillor about? WRITE IN AND CODE.

SUBJECT	(23)	CONCERNED	(24)
Council Housing/Rents ----- 1		Respondent & family only ----- 1	
Rates ----- 2		Other people as well ----- 2	
Planning ----- 3			(23 / 24)
Education ----- 4			
Street cleaning/Refuse ----- 5			
Social services ----- 6			
Roads/Traffic/Parking ----- 7			
Vandalism ----- 8			
Other ----- 9			

5 SHOWCARD G How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the way your
councillor dealt with the matter?

(25)

Very satisfied ----- 1
Fairly satisfied ----- 2
Neither ----- 3
Fairly dissatisfied ----- 4
Very dissatisfied ----- 5
Don't know ----- 6

(25)

INTERVIEWER CHECK Q20 Has respondent ever complained to council offices?

(26)

Yes ----- 1 GO TO Q30a
No ----- 2 ASK Q26

(26)

Q26 Have you ever contacted a council department of (local council) by phone, visit or letter?

(27)

Yes ----- 1 ASK Q27
No ----- 2 GO TO Q30a

(27)

Q27 When did you last do this?

(28)

In the last month ----- 1
More than 1 month but less than 3 months ago ---- 2
More than 3 months but less than 6 months ago --- 3
More than 6 months but less than 12 months ago -- 4
Over a year ago ----- 5

(28)

Q28 What did you contact the council about? WRITE IN AND CODE.

SUBJECT

(29)

CONCERNED

(30)

Council Housing/Rents ----- 1 Respondent & family only --- 1
Rates ----- 2 Other people as well ----- 2
Planning ----- 3
Education ----- 4
Street cleaning/Refuse ----- 5
Social services ----- 6
Roads/Traffic/Parking ----- 7
Vandalism ----- 8
Other ----- 9

(29
/
30)

Q29 SHOWCARD G How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the way the council dealt with the matter?

(31)

Very satisfied ----- 1
Fairly satisfied ----- 2
Neither ----- 3
Fairly dissatisfied ----- 4
Very dissatisfied ----- 5
Don't know ----- 6

(31)

ASK ALL

Q30a SHOWCARD H Now suppose your local council was proposing a scheme which you thought was really wrong, which, if any, of the things on this card do you think you would do? You can choose as many or as few as you like.

Q30b And which one do you think would be most effective in influencing your local council to change its mind? CODE ONE ONLY

	Q30a (32)	Q30b (34)	
Contact councillor -----	1 -----	1	
Contact council offices -----	2 -----	2	
Contact Ombudsman -----	3 -----	3	
Contact MP -----	4 -----	4	
Contact District Auditor -----	5 -----	5	
Contact local newspaper/radio -	6 -----	6	(32 / 35)
Contact other people (WRITE IN)			
	7 -----	7	
Sign a petition -----	8 -----	8	
Go on a protest or demonstration -----	9 -----	9	
Take council to court -----	0 -----	0	
Vote against council -----	X -----	X	
Other (WRITE IN) -----			
	Y -----	Y	
	(33)	(35)	
None of these -----	1 -----	1	
Don't know -----	2 -----	2	

Q31 Some local councils are elected in a single election, held once every four years, while in other areas part of the council is elected one year, part the next and so on. Which do you think is the better idea READ OUT:

	(36)	
Electing the whole council once every four years --	1	(36)
or Electing part of the council each year -----	2	
(Don't know) -----	3	

Q32 In most areas all councillors come from one of the political parties and councils are organised on party lines. There are some areas where most councillors are independent and the council is not organised on party lines. Which do you personally think is the better system..... READ OUT:

	(37)	
The party system -----	1	(37)
Or the non party system -----	2	
(Don't know) -----	3	

Q33 Do you think that in the last 10 years or so, local councils have become more or less dominated by party politics, or has it not changed?

	(38)	
More -----	1	
Less -----	2	(38)
Not changed -----	3	
Don't know -----	4	

Q34 Thinking now about national politics, generally speaking do you usually think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal, Social Democrat, Alliance or what?

	(39)	
Conservative -----	1	
Labour -----	2	
Liberal -----	3	ASK
Social Democrat -----	4	Q35
Alliance -----	5	(39)
Other (WRITE IN) _____		

	6	
None -----	7	GO TO
Don't know -----	8	Q36a
Refused -----	9	

Q35 How strongly (party at Q34) do you generally feel - very, fairly strongly or not very strongly?

	(40)	
Very strongly -----	1	
Fairly strongly -----	2	
Not very strongly -----	3	(40)
Don't know -----	4	

Q36a How much interest do you have in what's going on in national politics? READ OUT:

	(41)	
A great deal -----	1	
A fair amount -----	2	
Not much -----	3	(41)
or None at all -----	4	
(Don't know) -----	5	

Q36b SHOWCARD J How often do you discuss national politics with other people? CODE BELOW.

	(42)	
Never -----	1	
Rarely -----	2	
Occasionally -----	3	(42)
Quite often -----	4	

Q37a How much interest do you have in what's going on in local politics? READ OUT:

	(43)	
A great deal -----	1	
A fair amount -----	2	
Not much -----	3	(43)
or None at all -----	4	
(Don't know) -----	5	

Q37b SHOWCARD J And how often do you discuss local politics with other people?

	(44)	
Never -----	1	
Rarely -----	2	
Occasionally -----	3	(44)
Quite often -----	4	

Q38 SHOWCARD K On this card are a number of ways the Government could deal with spending on pensions, schools, the NHS, and so on, and with taxes. Which option do you prefer? CODE ONE ONLY.

	(45)	
Cut government spending quite a lot so that taxes can be cut -----	1	
Cut government spending a little so that taxes remain the same -----	2	
Keep government spending as it is and raise taxes a little -----	3	(45)
Increase government spending and raise taxes quite a lot -----	4	
Don't know -----	5	

Q39 Did you manage to vote in the last General Election in June 1983?
Which party did you vote for?

	(46)	
Too young to vote -----	1	
Did not vote -----	2	
Voted - Conservative -----	3	(46)
Labour -----	4	
Alliance -----	5	
Other -----	6	
Can't remember/Refused -----	7	

Q40 Many people for one reason or another do not actually vote in council elections. Did you personally manage to vote in the last election for (county) council in?

	(47)	
Too young to vote -----	1	GO TO
Did not vote -----	2	Q42
Voted -----	3	ASK Q41
Can't remember/Refused -----	4	GO TO Q42

Q41 Who did you vote for? IF NAME GIVEN PROMPT FOR PARTY.

	(48)	
Conservative -----	1	
Labour -----	2	
Alliance -----	3	
Independent/Ratepayer -----	4	(48)
Other -----	5	
Can't remember/Refused -----	6	

ASK ALL

Q42 Did you manage to vote in the last election for ... (local) council in ...?

	(49)	
Too young to vote -----	1	GO TO
Did not vote -----	2	Q44a
Voted -----	3	ASK Q43
Can't remember/Refused -----	4	GO TO Q44a

Q43 Who did you vote for? IF NAME GIVEN PROMPT FOR PARTY.

	(50)	
Conservative -----	1	
Labour -----	2	
Alliance -----	3	
Independent/Ratepayer -----	4	(50)
Other -----	5	
Can't remember/Refused -----	6	

ASK ALL

Q44a In some countries voting in local elections is compulsory. Do you think it would be a good idea or a bad idea for voting in local elections to be made compulsory in Britain?

	(51)	
Good idea -----	1	
Bad idea -----	2	(51)
Don't know -----	3	

Q44b SHOWCARD L If there was a General Election tomorrow how likely or unlikely would you be to vote?

	(52)
Certain not to -----	1 GO TO Q46
Very unlikely to -----	2 ASK Q45a
Fairly unlikely to -----	3
Fairly likely to -----	4
Very likely to -----	5
Certain to -----	6
Don't know -----	7

(52)

Q45a If there was a General Election tomorrow how would you vote?
IF UNDECIDED OR REFUSED ASK Q45b

Q45b Which party are you most inclined to support?

	Q45a		Q45b
	(53)		(54)
Conservative -----	1		1
Labour -----	2		2
Alliance -----	3		3
Other -----	4		4
Would not vote -----	5		5
Undecided -----	6 ASK		6
Refused -----	7 Q45b		7

(53
/
54)

ASK ALL

Q46 SHOWCARD L Bearing in mind that many people do not vote in local council elections how likely or unlikely would you be to vote if there was an election tomorrow for (local council)

	(55)
Certain not to -----	1
Very unlikely to -----	2
Fairly unlikely to -----	3
Fairly likely to -----	4
Very likely to -----	5
Certain to -----	6
Don't know -----	7

(55)

INTERVIEWER CHECK. IF CODE AT Q44b IS HIGHER THAN CODE AT Q46, ASK Q47, OTHERS GO TO Q48a.

Q47 Why would you be more likely to vote in a General Election than in a local election? PROBE FULLY.

(56)

1 2 3 4
5 6 7 8
9 0 X Y

ASK ALL

Q48a If you did vote in a local council election who would you vote for? IF NAME GIVEN PROMPT FOR PARTY.
IF UNDECIDED OR REFUSED ASK Q48b.

Q48b Who are you most inclined to vote for?

	(57) 48c		(58) 48b
Conservative -----	1		1 ASK Q49
Labour -----	2 GO TO Q49		2
Alliance -----	3		3
Independent/Ratepayer -----	4		4
Other -----	5		5
Would not vote -----	6 GO TO Q51		6 GO TO
undecided -----	7 ASK Q48b		7 Q51
Refused -----	8		8

(57
/
58)

Q49 Why would you vote for them?

(59)
1 2 3 4
5 6 7 8
9 0 X Y

*INTERVIEWER CHECK Did respondent give a different party at Q48 from the one at Q45?

(60)
Yes ----- 1 ASK Q50
No ----- 2 GO TO Q51

(60)

Q50 Is there any particular reason why you would vote for different parties in a General Election and a local election?

(61)
No ----- 1
Yes (WRITE IN) ----- 2

(61)

ASK ALL

Q51 Are there any local issues which would be important to you in deciding how to vote in a local election? What are they?

(62)
No ----- 1
Yes - rates ----- 2
 rents/housing ----- 3
 planning ----- 4
 Education ----- 5
 Street cleaning/refuse ----- 6
 Social Services ----- 7
 Health ----- 8
 Unemployment ----- 9
 Other (WRITE IN) _____
_____ 0

(62)

Q52a If you are voting in a General Election do you vote more for an individual candidate or more for the party he or she is from?
CODE BELOW.

Q52b And if you are voting in a local election do you vote more for an individual candidate, or more for the party he or she is from?

	Q52a (63)	Q52b (64)	
Candidate -----	1 -----	1 -----	
Party -----	2 -----	2 -----	
Both equally -----	3 -----	3 -----	(63
Don't know -----	4 -----	4 -----	/
Don't vote -----	5 -----	5 -----	64)

Q53 If you are voting in a local council election, are you influenced more by local issues or more by national issues?

	(65)	
Local -----	1 -----	
National -----	2 -----	
Both equal -----	3 -----	(65)
Don't know -----	4 -----	

Q54 SHOWCARD M How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about local council elections?

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Don't Know	
a) The people who get in at local council elections can have a big effect on the way people like me vote -----	1 -----	2 -----	3 -----	4 -----	5 -----	6 -----	(66)
b) The people you vote for say they'll do things for you, but once they're in they forget what they've said -----	1 -----	2 -----	3 -----	4 -----	5 -----	6 -----	(67)
c) The way that people vote at local council elections is the main thing that decides how things are run in this area -----	1 -----	2 -----	3 -----	4 -----	5 -----	6 -----	(68)
d) Local council elections are sometimes so complicated that I really don't know who to vote for -----	1 -----	2 -----	3 -----	4 -----	5 -----	6 -----	(69)
e) So many other people vote in local council elections that it's not important whether I vote or not -----	1 -----	2 -----	3 -----	4 -----	5 -----	6 -----	(70)

Q55 Do you regularly read a daily morning paper? Which?

	(71)	
Daily Express -----	1	
Daily Mail -----	2	
Daily Mirror/Record -----	3	
Daily Star -----	4	
Daily Telegraph -----	5	
Financial Times -----	6	
Glasgow Herald -----	7	
Guardian -----	8	
Scotsman -----	9	
Sun -----	0	
Times -----	X	
Local Regional paper -----	Y	
None -----	N	(71)

Q56a Do you regularly read an evening newspaper?

Q56b Do you regularly read a local weekly paper? Which? CHECK PAPER IS LOCAL

Q56c Do you regularly watch the local evening television news? PROMPT WITH DETAILS

Q56d Do you regularly listen to local news programmes in independent local radio or BBC local radio?

	Q56a	Q56b	Q56c	Q56d	
	(72)	(73)	(74)	(75)	(72
Yes -----	1	1	1	1	/
No -----	2	2	2	2	75)

Q57 Do you know if your household pays rates?

	(76)
Yes, does pay -----	1
No, does not pay -----	2
Don't know -----	3
	(76)

Q58 Does your household get a rate rebate? IF YES PROBE FOR FULL OR PARTIAL

	(77)
Yes - full -----	1
Yes - partial -----	2
Yes - don't know if full	
or partial -----	3
No -----	4
Don't know -----	5
	(77)

Q47 Why would you be more likely to vote in a General Election than a local election?

Col. 266

1. General elections more important/feel more strongly about national issues.
2. Central government controls the country/affects the whole country
3. Central government controls local government/sets spending limits for local government/local government has no control.
4. Central government affects our lives more/sets taxes/affects standard of living.
5. Duty to vote in general election/feel I must vote.
6. Vote at general election to change government
7. Same party always get in locally.
8. Hear more about general election than local/media make general election more important.
9. Know nothing about local council/local candidate.
0. Not interested in local politics/local government/cannot be bothered
- X. Other
- Y. Don't know

Q49 Why would you vote for that political party?

Col. 259

1. Always vote for them
2. Family vote for them/brought up to vote for them.
3. They are best party/party I want to get in/good party.
4. Like their policies/policies agree with mine.
5. Do a good job/get things done.
6. Dislike other parties/other parties' policies/other parties too extreme.
7. Time for a change/give someone else a chance/see what they can do.
8. Middle of the road/moderate.
9. Party for the common man/working man.
0. More caring/considerate
- X. Other
- Y. Don't Know

Col. 260

3. Good candidate/Know candidate/local candidate/good candidate for area.
4. Rates too high/to bring rates down.

Q.50 Why have you voted for different parties at local and general elections?

Col. 261

- 1.
- 2.
3. Depends on manifesto
4. Like local candidate/good local man.
5. There is not a candidate for my party at both local and general elections.
6. To keep another party out of power.
7. Party politics at national level and personal at local level.
8. See them run small area first.
- 9.
- 0.
- X. Other reasons
- Y. Don't know

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